

Big Brother

REX BEACH

BIG BROTHER
and
Other Stories



BOOKS BY REX BEACH

The Auction Block
The Barrier
The Crimson Gardenia
Flowing Gold
Going Some
The Heart of the Sunset
The Iron Trail
Laughing Bill Hyde
The Ne'er-Do-Well
The Net
Oh, Shoot!
Rainbow's End
The Silver Horde
The Spoilers
Too Fat to Fight
The Winds of Chance

BIG BROTHER

AND

OTHER STORIES

BY
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Author of
FLOWING GOLD, THE SILVER HORDE,
OH, SHOOT! ETC.



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BIG BROTHER & OTHER STORIES

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BLACK EAGLE'S braves were on the warpath. Wailing women, orphaned children, burning settlements marked their trail. But they had come to grips at last with Murray's Scouts and in the battle quarter was neither asked nor given.

Murray's men were famous Indian fighters; gradually they forced the redskins back and finally brought them to bay in a deep canyon—a cul-de-sac inclosed on three sides by perpendicular walls. Here the work of extermination began. Murray charged at the head of his band; he rode his white horse, Fleetwing, right in among the yelling savages and, drawing his six-shooter, he leveled it at the breast of Black Eagle himself.

Murray was an unerring shot. He never drew except to shoot, he never shot except to slay. He paused an instant before pressing trigger as if to give Black Eagle one more moment of life, and at that instant an unexpected interruption occurred. It came in the form of a cry, a long, shrill, commanding cry from high up on one of the canyon

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walls; it caused the bloodthirsty warriors, both red and white, to cease their yelling and to raise their eyes aloft.

It was repeated: "Willie-e-e! You Willie Sheehan!"

In an open window of the Sheehan flat appeared the face of Mrs. Sheehan herself. She looked down with disfavor upon this battle. Briefly she commanded:

"Stop that panjammonia an' get me a cabbage from the Wop's."

Black Eagle's tomahawk fell; he showed anything except relief at his deliverance from the deadly aim of his white foe. In a highly aggrieved treble he protested:

"Aw, mom! I can't! Aw, *mom!*"

"He's an Injun," excitedly shouted Captain Murray. "I gotta moider him foist, Miz' Sheehan."

"Ple-ease, mom! Let sis get it."

"She's out wid the baby," came the voice from on high. "Murdher, is it? Tell the Wop it better be a fresh one or a Sheehan will be up for murdher." The window descended with a bang.

Black Eagle stirred, but as he went he dragged his heels; he kicked viciously at a tin can. Gone entirely was his high defiance; in its place abode a sullen, spiritless reluctance and he moved with the apathy of one long suffering from hook worm.

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Captain Murray, too, was put out, for, above all things, he loved to kill Indians. But the war was over; the kids were streaming out of the vacant lot. Why couldn't grown folks mind their own business?

Jimmy Donovan, who had been watching the battle from the sidewalk, grinned at the sudden termination of hostilities. Jimmy liked kids and understood them; he was especially fond of little Midge Murray and hence he was sorry the massacre had been so rudely interrupted. Midge was a great boy, always in the lead, always on the winning side. That was a good sign in a kid; that was the sort of kid Jimmy had been. It meant that Midge would amount to something.

Inasmuch as this story deals largely with these two, it may be well here to explain something about them. Donovan, young, tidy, debonair, idle of hand but active of mind, was a famous character and a person of importance in the neighborhood of East Ninetieth Street, for he was none other than the head of the notorious Car Barn gang, an organization well, if not favorably, known to the entire East Side of New York. Midge was the brother of Big Ben Murray, his fellow gangster, his pal, and his first lieutenant.

Nothing more about the boy need be said just now, but Donovan and his gang require some further introduction. In New York there are six

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principal street gangs, all of which are peculiar products of Manhattan conditions and each one of which exercises what amounts to exclusive privileges of outlawry in its own district. On the West Side, for instance, are the Hell's Kitchen gang, the Gophers, and the Hudson Dusters; on the East Side are the Gas House, the Hell Gate, and the Car Barn gangs—bands of loafers, all of them, whose members manage to exist without toil and who live in daily defiance of the less serious provisions of the criminal code. These gangsters are not habitual crooks, nor are they hoodlums in the common sense of the word; rather are they minor malefactors, Jonathan Wilds, Arabs of the asphalt, mutineers against the law. Such was Jimmy Donovan and such had been the general state of affairs among the six separate gangs until he fought his way up to leadership of the Car Barn crowd. Having acquired a position of influence and having apprised himself of the economic advantages arising from trusts and monopolies, he had effected a sort of consolidation of the scattered gangs and made himself the rowdy czar of Manhattan.

It was a feat of genuine leadership, and Donovan had exercised his new powers by relieving an inherent grudge against the police. He had long been a thorn and a vexation to them; it became his amusement, nay, his hobby, once he had acquired power, to

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annoy, to harass, and to persecute them in every possible manner. Following his elevation to office, life for such uniformed men as were stationed in the gang-ridden sections of the city became a trial and a misery. Rowdyism grew and efforts to check it were met with a defiant cunning hitherto unknown. Violence evoked violence and casualties were not light. One policeman, for instance, who made so bold as to invade the Car Barn rendezvous while the gang was in exuberant spirits, was thrown bodily out of a third-story window, and other meddlers met fates equally unpleasant and quite as disastrous. Jimmy and his friends were rough boys.

Of course, the prompt order went out to "get" Donovan, but his skill in avoiding traps, his ever-ready and ingenious alibis, his knack of evading consequences, were as unique as his gift for organization and it was almost impossible to hang anything on him. Even when apprehended, which was rarely, he proved to be as slippery as an eel in a bucket of ice, for he had mastered most of Houdini's tricks and handcuffs fell from his wrists as if made of putty. On one occasion when he had been manacled, he freed himself, lovingly patted his captor upon the cheek, and disappeared. At another time he concluded a mockingly emotional farewell speech from the steps of a patrol wagon by suddenly slipping his handcuffs, upsetting his captors, and

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getting away clean. His most notable exploit in this line, however, had been his escape from the precinct station house after he was actually booked and locked up. The officer who had made the arrest had received the congratulations of those who could best appreciate the difficulty of his accomplishment, and was leaving the station house, when he was thunderstruck to behold his prisoner reading the World's Series bulletins directly across the street. The officer had felt sure that he must be dreaming, until he had received a bright smile and a wave of the hand from the gangster as he melted into the crowd.

Exploits of this sort quite naturally gained for Jimmy a reputation. In spite of his calling, he became a sort of East Side hero, and the police writhed under the gibes of local residents. A good many people liked Jimmy—that was because of his smile, no doubt—and in consequence of their fondness it became increasingly difficult to fasten anything upon him—yes, and well nigh impossible to make out a case against him after haling him into court.

The police gave him up, finally, as a bad job and deliberately ignored him. It was a triumph for the gangster. He did as he pleased, thereafter, and his reputation grew. He was immune and he enjoyed the strange sensation—for a while. Then one day he awoke to the fact that he was bored.

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So long as he had walked in danger, there had been a zest to living; now there was none. He realized with a shock that he was out of a job. For years, necessity had filed his wits to razor edge; rust was dulling them. His tautened nerves had vibrated like violin strings at concert pitch; with nothing to fear, they were letting down and he was getting out of tune. To offset the miseries of ennui Jim became reckless; he waged a more open war of terrorism upon the police, but they failed to react to it—their reflexes were dead. Paralysis had set in. He gave up finally in disgust. He became restless, irritable; he loafed about openly and fearlessly. The depth of his boredom may be imagined when he could find relief in watching kids playing "Indian warpath." Such was his wretched condition to-day.

"Hey, fellahs!" It was Midge Murray's shrill voice that arrested the other children. "Wanna see Jimmy do his tricks?" Midge was proud of his proprietary rights in the Car Barn outlaw and he never failed to exercise them. "C'mon, fellahs! I can make 'im. Show 'em dat one wit' de quarter, Jim."

"I got a new one—wit' matches," Donovan said as the urchins crowded about him. He took an ordinary match and broke it into three short pieces; these he laid in Midge Murray's grimy little paw. Next he showed his own hands—they were white

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and well shaped, by the way—then picking the fragments one by one from Midge's hand, he transferred them to his left palm. "How many is dat?" he inquired.

"T'ree!"

Mr. Donovan closed his left palm over its contents, made a magic pass, then he inverted it and out into Midge's palm he let fall—four pieces of match! The boys laughed, all but the redoubtable Indian fighter himself.

"Aw, ye had it between yer fingers alla time," Midge declared. "I kin do dat meself."

"Yeah? Well, look at me mit. Take a good look." Donovan opened wide his fingers and the boys made a thorough inspection, front and back. He discarded one piece of match, transferred the remaining three to his left hand as before, closed his fingers, repeated the magic pass. "Now, Mr. Fresh——!"

Slowly Jim opened his fingers and there were four fragments again. One of these he threw away, as before, and once again another took its place. He repeated the performance several times.

"Laugh dat off," he told Midge with a grin.

This *was* mysterious. It was even more mysterious when Jim made a quarter disappear before everybody's eyes and then picked it off the end of a kid's nose or out of another's ear. He had them tie his

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thumbs tightly together with a piece of stout cord—so tightly that he “ouched” and made a terrible face at the pain—then he directed one of them to stand off and toss an iron hoop to him. He caught the hoop in his bound hands and—whaddye know about that? It came to rest upon one of his arms, having evidently passed right through between his two thumbs. But his thumbs were still tightly tied together! This was genuine magic.

It was a tribute to Jimmy’s powers of entertainment that Father Dan Marron was permitted to approach unobserved close enough to watch this performance.

“That’s a good trick,” said the priest.

Jimmy’s hands came apart somehow and he touched his hat. He respected the cloth but he distrusted it.

Murray and his scouts promptly transferred their fickle attention to Father Dan, for he was the best loved man on East Ninetieth Street and the particular pal of each and every boy present, but he sent them away, saying,

“Run along now. I want a word with Donovan.” Then when they had obeyed, “I’ve got a bone to pick with you, Jim.” Father Marron’s good-natured face had become stern; his lips were set in a firm straight line. Jimmy eyed him curiously, suspiciously.

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"You're the ringleader of all the rowdies, aren't you? You're the boss, the high mogul of all the street gangsters, and your word is law."

"Huh! You been talkin' wit' some copper," Donovan mildly protested. "You can't believe nuttin' dey tell you, Father. Coppers believes in fairies an' Santy Claus an' all dem t'ings. Honest!"

"You needn't incriminate yourself. And, by the same token, you needn't try to pull the wool over my eyes. I'm not talking as a priest. This is man to man. I've been telling myself you were a sort of East Side Robin Hood, but it seems I was wrong. I've watched your doings—watched you terrorize the police and run things to suit yourself—and I've never said a word, but when you begin to annoy women, when you make it unsafe for decent girls to go about alone——"

"Wait a minute," Donovan broke in sharply. "Who says I done dat?"

"I say so. At least one of your precious Car Barn gang did it and that's the same as you. He's your man; he'd never dare, except for your protection."

"Who done it?"

"Miller. 'Cokey Joe,' they call him."

"Oh, *him*! He was steamin' wit' hop, Father. He must a' been."

"Nothing of the sort. He did it more than once. And the nicest girl in the whole parish, too."

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"Goils is like coppers, Father. Dey t'ink de woild's against 'em."

"Not Kitty Costello."

There was a momentary silence, then Donovan repeated, queerly, "Kitty Costello!" A change, slow but perceptible, crept over his face; it was no longer pleasant to look upon, for some emotion had erased the signs of good nature that he wore as a mask for the world, leaving a countenance hard and evil tempered.

"Any man who'd annoy that girl——" the priest began, but Jimmy interrupted, roughly:

"Don't boost her wit' me. It ain't necessary. Take me woid, Father, she's as safe from now on as you are. Cokey Joe an' me—Huh! We'll have dat understood."

A brief scrutiny appeared to satisfy the priest. "All right," said he. "I've never interfered with you and yours. See that your Cokey Joes don't interfere with me and mine." He walked on.

Father Marron's accusation had struck the gangster deep, for if the latter had a religion of any sort, Kitty Costello was it. Cokey Joe had dared to accost her, to insult her, whereas Jimmy himself had never even presumed to raise his hat to her. It seemed incredible that any member of his gang—even a hop-head—could so far forget the unwritten law of the Car Barn crowd as to molest a girl, much

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less one of Kitty's kind. But Father Dan didn't lie. As Jimmy set out in search of Miller he hoped he would find the fellow in his normal state of mind, for if Cokey Joe had any artificial courage aboard there might be serious trouble.

Fortunately for the sake of this story, Miller was in the dumps when Donovan discovered him and he met the latter's accusation with little more than a whining apology. But apologies did not satisfy the irate Donovan and for once in his career he indulged in personal abuse unbecoming a leader. He was burning up and Cokey Joe heard language concerning himself—language voiced in the hearing of his comrades—such as no member of any gang could either forgive or forget. For days thereafter Miller pondered that language resentfully and the longer he thought about it the more vengeful he became.

Bawl him out, would he? In front of people. Donovan was getting swelled on himself, cursing a guy and making him eat dirt in public. And over a skirt, too. If he thought he could get away with that stuff he was crazy. It was time somebody pulled him down. Yes, and Miller believed he knew who could and would do it. At the first opportunity he went down into the Italian quarter and there held earnest conversation with one Mike Navarro.

This Navarro was, in his way, a character quite as distinctive as Jimmy Donovan and far more dan-

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gerous to the community. For years the papers had referred to a Mike Navarro gang, but, strictly speaking, there was no such thing, for Italian criminals do not operate in gangs, or if upon occasion they do, their organizations are so secret, their activities are so carefully guarded, that definite proof of their existence is difficult to uncover. Associations of some sort there must be, but how loose or how tight nobody seems to know and certain it is that there are no bands among them such as Jimmy Donovan headed. Navarro, himself, was a stevedore, or posed as such, and now and then he actually worked at that trade—in his idle moments, so to speak—but most of his time was devoted to tasks more subtle and more lucrative. In great cities, blackmail, extortion, dark enterprises of various sorts, can frequently be made to pay better than honest occupations.

Compared with Mike Navarro's furtive undertakings, the depredations of Donovan and his amateur outlaws were little more than harmless pranks; nevertheless the two factions had clashed, seriously, and there was bad blood between them.

Knowing well the state of affairs, Cokey Joe Miller set himself the agreeable task of fanning the embers of that smoldering feud, and he met with better success than he had hoped for. The coals needed only to be breathed upon, and he returned to his haunts

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well satisfied with his journey. So! Jim would make a bum of him, would he?

Jimmy Donovan had learned that all work and no play brings dissatisfaction even to people who don't work; in order, therefore, to provide an outlet for the social yearnings of his followers he had formed a club, a polite organization which gave dances at irregular intervals. It was known as the Pat McGraw Pastime Club, Mr. McGraw being the political boss of that neighborhood, and its functions were taken quite as seriously as were the gate receipts, which latter went directly into the till of the Car Barn gang and were an ever-present help in time of need.

People there were who imagined that a Pat McGraw Pastime ball was an amusing burlesque and afforded opportunities for an adventurous slumming expedition, or that suggestive Barbary Coast dances and strange goings-on could be observed there, but they were mistaken. As a matter of fact, a rigid propriety was enforced. More than once Big Ben Murray had ordered off the floor couples from the Park Avenue district who were "dancing tough," as he put it, and it availed them nothing to argue that they were merely following the practices in vogue at the smart hotels. When Big Ben declared a dance indecent, indecent it was, and if the guilty parties persisted in argument, out they went. On

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their bonnets! Nor had any woman ever smoked a cigarette—not a whole one. At about the third draw Ben bounced the lady's escort. Some he bounced all the way downstairs, giving the girls the choice of going under their own motive power or of suffering the same fate. Nobody ever pulled any rough stuff at a Pastime party.

This particular dance was expected to be the biggest and the finest in the club's history, and to that end Jimmy Donovan personally saw to the details, even to the decorations of the hall, to the hiring of Rosenbluth's Jazz Kings, to the catering and cloak-room arrangements, and the like. He did his work well and the affair proved to be no disappointment.

Not only were the Car Barners present to the last man, but also dressy delegations from the affiliated gangs attended, and these, together with the unattached youth and beauty of the neighborhood, made up a crowd of several hundred. There were a dozen or more tuxedos in evidence, and several evening coats. The tails of these latter were considerably longer than usual and their collars rode high in the back, but they lent a distinction, a refinement of elegance, to the wearers which was well worth the rental price. As for feminine loveliness, there was a plenty. Your New York working girl adores parties, and with the Fifth Avenue shop windows

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to copy from she can manage, even on a small salary, to appear extremely chic. Jimmy told himself proudly, in looking them over, that the Ritz never boasted a sweller bunch of dames than this.

His complacency received a jolt, however, when about ten o'clock Izzy the Jew, one of the men on the door, hurried to him with the breathless announcement that the Mike Navarros were buying tickets.

"There's a dozen of 'em an' their girls. Mike's with 'em. They're comin' up now."

Jimmy uttered an exclamation of dismay, then swiftly he sped to Big Ben Murray. There was time only for a whispered word of warning when Navarro himself appeared in the doorway followed by several other Italians and their lady friends. For a moment they stood in a group, eying the dancers revolving beneath the gaudy loops of paper decorations with which the hall was hung.

Recognition was swift. There came a lull in the babble of voices, and the sound of scuffling feet alone kept time to the blaring saxaphones. Startled faces were turned toward the entrance; some of the couples ceased dancing.

Donovan acted promptly, in the only manner possible, by crossing the floor with hand extended and with an agreeable smile upon his face.

"Hello, Mike!" he said, genially.

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Navarro limply took the proffered hand, and showed his white teeth in an answering grin as Jimmy bade him welcome, but his eyes meanwhile remained watchful and the men who had come with him were equally alert.

"You havin' beeg dance, eh?"

"Sure! De biggest we ever pulled. Me friends is all here. *All* of 'em." Jimmy purposely emphasized the last statement. "We're coit'ny glad to see youse boys," he lied.

Navarro carelessly introduced his companions and Jim mitted them all, conscious the while that his palms were growing wet. A run-in with these Wops would have been welcome anywhere, any time, except here and now in the presence of these women and outsiders. He heard himself wishing the newcomers good health and talking about the weather. It was a grand night for a nice, orderly party, and the Pat McGraw parties were always orderly, with never a harsh word spoke by nobody, or if they did they got the worst of it, so a guy was safe in bringing his girl—he could bring his mother, for that matter—so long as she behaved herself—and the proprietors of the hall were personally liable for coats and hats.

Navarro smiled fixedly and agreed that the club's reputation was indeed excellent and that a nice time would undoubtedly be had by all. Several

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of the couples who had come with him joined those on the floor; gradually the talking and the laughter were resumed.

But a certain constraint lingered, and Jimmy Donovan cursed silently as he saw more than one pair of dancers slipping quietly out to the coat room. The mere presence of Navarro's crowd would crab any party; already this one was cold. And of course they were looking for some sort of trouble.

The late arrivals danced pretty much with their own partners, and between dances they remained close together, an ominous sign. As time wore on, Jimmy Donovan experienced all the discomforts of a Turkish bath and he gained little relief from the fact that Big Ben Murray and one or two other dependables managed invariably to remain in the rear or on the flank of the visitors. Ben was always a tower of strength, but to-night the worried Jim felt his heart go out to him. He was watchful, swift, and ruthless, was Ben; Jimmy Donovan was his god. If anything could deter Mike Navarro and his gunmen from their evident purpose, the big gangster's menacing presence should do so.

As for Jimmy, himself, the situation demanded that he give no sign of apprehension and he rose to it as best he could, but he managed most of the time to remain in the vicinity of the switch box which controlled the lights in the hall.

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The explosion was slow in coming; Navarro's girl set the spark when one of the Car Barn men asked her to dance. His request was formal; it was couched in polite words and voiced in a tone of such perfect respect that Mrs. Astor herself could not have resented it.

"I'd t'ank ye for de nex' waltz, if ye'd be so kind as to gimme it." Thus the invitation was spoken.

But Navarro's girl screamed, and to her escort she cried, indignantly, "That bum insulted me!"

Calamity followed. In one swift, sweeping movement Mike Navarro reached for his automatic, drew and fired it. But instead of firing at the man who had committed the outrage he fired at Jimmy Donovan. The latter, however, at that first scream had been galvanized into movement equally swift, and the stevedore's bullet buried itself in the wall a foot behind him as he ducked toward the switchboard. It would have been necessary to lead Jim as a flying bird is led.

Before Navarro could fire a second time Big Ben Murray had shot him through the chest.

The Italian reeled; he turned a queer, shocked face toward the tall gangster; his expression was one of stark, blank amazement. As his knees sagged and he pitched forward the weapons of his followers were turned upon his slayer. There was no missing

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the big fellow, for some of the Italians were within ten feet of him. Ben was riddled.

Then the lights went out and black terror fell. There were more shots—wicked stabs of fire—a rush of trampling feet, a crashing of chairs overturned and smashed, a bedlam of shrieks and curses and hoarse shouts. Against the windows, illumined by the street lights from below, were silhouetted figures in flight, figures crouched in cowering dread, others struggling to reach the fire escapes or to hurl themselves out. The crowd stampeded; it fought blindly; out into the hallway and down the stairs it surged.

Jimmy Donovan threw on the lights when he felt sure the marauders had fled, and a tragic desolation was revealed. What he saw was furniture wrecked and overturned, band instruments abandoned, garments strewn about, terrified and dishevelled creatures crouching in corners. It was as if the hall had been swept by a tornado.

Navarro lay where he had fallen, but Big Ben had somehow dragged himself out from under the rushing feet and was propped upon his hands. Jimmy ran to him, and it was well he came, for the big gangster was fighting for his last breath.

- Donovan sobbed and cursed in broken, choking gasps as he took Ben into his arms.

“He’d ’a’ copped ye, Jim, only I beat him to it.”

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"Ben! Wha'd ye let them rats get ye for? For de love o' God, Ben——!"

Murray groaned with the pain of his going. When others came and proffered help in lifting him he rolled his head weakly.

"Nuttin' doin'!" he told them. Then: "Listen, Jimmy, I can't—kick out like dis, on account o' Midge. Y'know—me little brudder."

"Get a doctor!" Jimmy cried, furiously, at the bystanders. "Get a doctor, quick, damn youse!"

Murray's weight became heavier in his pal's arms. "No chance. I got—mine. . . . But Midge! Ye gotta promise somethin'. . . . He's all alone now, Jimmy. You—gotta take 'im."

"Sure! Sure I will, Ben, but——"

"Honest to God?"

"Honest to God! Only you ain't——"

"An' bring him up decent. Y'know—not like me an' you."

"Sure."

"Mit me on it," whispered the dying man, and Jimmy clasped his hand.

"He's a—swell kid. . . . Smart, too, but kinda tough, a'ready. . . . Don't let 'im kick out like—dis. . . ." The words were little more than a rustle in the giant's throat, his lips were numb, his eyes were glazing. Then with a sudden, unexpected flicker

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of strength he cried, "If anyone tries to loin 'im anyt'ing rotten—*moider* 'em, Jimmy! Promise?"

"I promise. Sure I promise!" Jimmy exclaimed, hoarsely. "But you ain't goin' to kick out. Honest you ain't, Ben. You *can't*—! Ben—! Benny, old pal—! *Benny*—! Oh, my God!"

The police were entering now, followed by a curious crowd from the street. Some of them came and stood over the leader of the Car Barn gang, but not until one of them touched him upon the shoulder did he seem to know they had arrived. Then it was a bleak and stricken face he raised.

"I think I got something on this Donovan bird," Patrolman Collins confided to his fellow officer, Burke, perhaps two weeks after the Navarro raid. Collins and Burke were new men and they cherished a natural ambition to land the elusive Car Barn leader.

"He never started that row with the wops, if that's what you mean. I frisked him and he had nothin' on him," said Burke.

"Oh, sure! It ain't that; he's smugglin' some queer stuff into his room. First off a big teakettle or what looked like it, then a tub an' a lot of packages, I couldn't make out what. Sneaky about it, too."

"Yeah?"

"I ast him what was the tub; if he was startin' a

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laundry or something, an' he says, 'No. I got a Norwegian goldfish an' he's outgrown his cage.' Fresh as usual. He's bought an erl stove an'——"

"Oho! A teakettle, eh?" Burke was excited. "That was a still! An' the tub's for his mash!"

"Surest thing you know. If we crash in on him about the time he gets all set up an' the mash is good an' sour he'll have a hard job convincin' the judge it's turtle soup he's makin', won't he?"

"I'll tell the world!" Mr. Burke enthusiastically agreed. "It'll be poor us landin' young Houdini, right off the bat. Poor! He'll have the worm workin' about Saturday night. An' us on the beat less'n a month! Say! It's the young fellahs that knows how to use their head. A lotta these old wrinkles have been on the force so long they think a skull was just made to stretch a cap over, eh?"

During the next few days it did indeed seem as if the Car Barn leader must be engaged in some enterprise more than usually shady, for his actions were queer and in his bearing he was furtive, self-conscious, nervous. When Saturday night came and he returned home early in the evening, Collins and Burke closed in with the practical assurance that at last they had him.

Cautiously they felt their way up the dark stairs of the tenement in which he roomed. Outside his door they were halted by the sound of voices, one

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deep, firm, reassuring, the other high-pitched, thin, with a reedy quality induced evidently by some intense emotion. It appeared to be protesting wildly, hysterically, and—yes, profanely. Its profanities were broken by sobs.

Collins touched his companion on the arm and whispered, "He's got a girl. Tryin' to make her bootleg for him. Ready?"

The door creaked, bulged, gave way before the pressure of two burly shoulders; Collins spoke sharply as he stepped inside:

"Stick 'em up, Donovan! We want to taste that goldfish——" He did not finish his sentence, for an unexpected sight greeted him.

The room was warm and rankly odorous, to be sure, but not with the pungent fumes of fermenting mash. It smelled of laundry soap. Nor was there anywhere visible the bulging copper still, the coiled tubing, and other paraphernalia Collins and his pal had expected. Instead they beheld a galvanized iron washtub in the middle of the floor, and in the middle of the tub a very small, very angry, very tearful naked boy. He was soaped until he shone like a baby seal, and Jimmy Donovan, the street bandit, with coat off, sleeves up, and with a bungalow apron tied around his neck, was scrubbing the child with a brush—or thus he had been engaged when inter-

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rupted. He stood now facing the officers, poised in scowling defiance.

"W'at t'hell?" he queried, furiously, and both policemen were somehow aware that his anger was caused less by their sudden appearance than by his own outlandish garb and humiliating occupation. He did not lift his hands aloft.

At sight of the intruders the diminutive figure in the tub had doubled up in maiden modesty. It stamped its feet, then suddenly subsided—plunged itself into the soapsuds until only its head and shoulders were exposed.

"Get out, ya big bums!" it yelled, shrilly. "Get t'hell outa here. Beat it!"

"Say—what's goin' on?" Collins demanded, stupidly. He was sure there must be a still somewhere about, for the fanciful picture he had painted remained vividly in his mind. All he could see, however, was an ordinary room with two beds, an oil stove, a bureau, and the usual furnishings of a man's quarters—nothing more damning in the way of evidence.

"Looks like a pinch," the owner of the place snarled at him. "Well, what's on your mind besides hair? I s'pose I stole de Custom House. Hurry up, spill it."

Burke inquired: "Whose kid is that? An' what you doin'——?"

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"He's my kid, Midge Murray. Big Ben left him to me. Ye can't book a guy for washin' his own kid. It's Saturday night, ain't it? Or mebbe youse new coppers has changed de law, an' de day o' de week, too."

Mr. Burke looked at Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins returned the stare. A faint flush colored their sunburnt faces. "Um-m! There's a lot of hootch bein' made. You luggin' in all that plunder an' everything——"

Midge's eyes were red from the soap and from his tears, but he ceased rubbing them long enough to curse the officers anew and to make his own feelings understood beyond the slightest doubt. It was bad enough to be held under water by a big bully who soaped you all over and then scrubbed you with a stiff brush that hurt like hell, but to have strangers witness the indignity was more than he proposed to stand.

"Whaddya lookin' at, ya big tripes?" he shouted. "I'll get ya for dis; seef I don't get ya. Me 'n' my gang——" Midge's groping hands encountered somewhere in the tub the bar of soap that had been the cause of so much of his earlier anguish and seized upon it. He rose to hurl it at the nearest blue-coat, but it slipped out of his fingers and went skittering across the floor. Again he subsided with a wail. But he kicked his feet and splashed terribly. "T'row

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'em out, Jimmy. Bounce de kittle on 'em!" he squalled. "Ain't ya got de guts to bean a coupla squaretoes?"

"Ben kinda let him have his own way," Jimmy explained, "but I'm gonna make a man of him. Me, I ain't got de time, no more, to bootleg, if I wanted to."

"Let's go," said Officer Burke, and without a word Collins followed him out of the room.

It was true enough, Jimmy Donovan had taken his oath at par. He was not one to discount a promise exacted by a dying friend. Following Big Ben's going he had accepted a brother's full responsibility and now he suffered the consequences thereof, if not patiently, at least philosophically. Those consequences were more painful than ordinarily they would have been, for, although Ben had been a sturdy protector and had provided well enough for little Midge's animal comfort, he had allowed the boy to run wild and to develop an independent habit of looking out for himself, and naturally, therefore, Midge resented a show of authority on the part of an outsider, even though that outsider was Jimmy Donovan, his hero. A hero is all very well until you live with him and he begins to butt into your private affairs. Yes, and what could be more private, more sacred, than the right to bathe when and where and how you feel like bathing?

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If the truth must be known, Midge was not very clean when he came to Jimmy. In the summer it had been his habit to go paddling in the East River, but in winter, of course, there was no swimming, so when his new guardian, who was as meticulous as a cat in the care of his own person, told him that he was getting a bit "gamey" and admonished him to have a clean-up, the boy paid no heed. Bathing was a matter that could be attended to the first thing in the spring. Jimmy spoke to him several times; at last he ordered him to take a bath and to do it that very Saturday night. Midge retorted by telling him to go to hell and not to wait for Saturday. The result of that clash has just been told.

The two clashed again that evening. Their wills met for a second time when Jim unwrapped a flannel nightdress and told the boy to get into it. Midge eyed the garment with disdain and for the *n*th time told Jimmy what he thought of him. Jim was big enough and brutal enough to hold him down while he deliberately rubbed soap in his eyes and scoured the skin off his body with a wire brush—any big stiff could do that to a guy half his size—so he could probably put that thing on him, if he set his mind to it, but he, Midge Murray, was damned if Jim, or anybody else, was big enough to make him keep it on. He didn't propose to wear girls' clothes, even in bed. None of that effeminate stuff for him. He'd

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run away first. He'd go out West and join the Indians. The more he considered this proposition, the sorer and the more profane he became, until Jim had to read him a lecture on the evils of swearing.

It was the first lecture Donovan had ever delivered and he made heavy weather of it. When at last he had the boy in bed and the room tidied up and had gone down to join the gang, he was worn out.

It is characteristic of members of the underworld, so called, that they look after their young with a jealous care often lacking among people who move in higher circles of society. So it was with Donovan. To his mind, proper care commenced with cleanliness, so he commenced his education of the waif by inducing him to look upon bathing not as some absurd heathen ritual, but as a duty and a pleasure. He made of it a sort of game and convinced the boy, after some trying, that a stiff-bristled brush tickled almost as much as it hurt, if a fellow only thought it did, also that on week days it was practically as easy to wash back of one's ears as to trust to luck, and finally that it was a distinction, not a disgrace, to be cleaner than other boys.

No growing thing responds so quickly to weeding, to care, and to cultivation, as a child; once Midge's hostility had been overcome, his physical condition began to improve and his mind to grow. Nobody

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had ever taken an active personal interest in him up to this time, so when Jim adopted the practice of hearing his school lessons the boy was stimulated to study harder than ever before. This was fun; lesson books took on a new significance. It was tough on Jim, to be sure, for nobody is so busy as the man who loafes—the shorter a person's hours of actual toil, the harder it is to find an extra one for others—nevertheless he persisted, for Ben had made him promise to bring up the boy decently, not as they had been brought up. Donovan's severest trial, however, came when he helped Midge with his catechism, for here was something both foreign and distasteful. What portion of it he understood, he disagreed with. It was "the bunk." Still, kids needed religion, he reasoned, so he did his part and pretended that this was his gospel.

Of course, it was not long before a real companionship developed between the two, and for Midge life began to take on a new and wholly delightful aspect. He quickly grew to idolize the man he had merely liked and admired, and when he showed his love, his trust, his admiration, Jim experienced moments of mingled rapture and discomfort. To awaken sincere, unselfish adoration, even in a child, was thrilling; it hurt to realize how completely misplaced it was. He told himself that he certainly had the kid fooled, and that it was the duty of all grown

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folks to keep kids fooled until they grew up and had children of their own to fool; nevertheless, it continued to hurt.

When Midge was good, Jimmy did tricks for him, all sorts of tricks. When Jim was good, Midge sang for him. The lad had a velvety, untrained soprano voice with a peculiar emotional quality to its high notes and he knew a verse or two of most of the late songs, especially the popular "Blues." Some of the verses were not pretty, but Jim loved to listen to them as they came from the boy's lips.

The question of diet finally arose to concern the gangster. As a child, Jim had eaten what he could get, where and when he could get it, and he had always accepted the comfortable theory that anything a kid is big enough to eat he is old enough to eat. But that theory did not appear to fit Midge. In spite of all the good, nourishing steak, fried potatoes, cabbage, baked beans, pie, and coffee Jim could pile into him, the boy refused to fatten. On the contrary, he grew ever more skinny. Jimmy consulted several mothers, but about all the satisfaction he got out of them was the statement, variously expressed, that Midge was mighty fortunate in having so much elegant and high-priced food to prey upon, and the wish that their own Mickeys and Tommies and Tinos had the half of his luck; so one day he

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made bold to speak to Kitty Costello. Kitty knew everything.

"De Greek has got standin' orders to wrap dat boy around t'ree squares a day," he explained, "but it's no good. He gets littler an' littler. Why, he ain't de size o' me thumb!"

"Do you board at a restaurant?" the girl inquired, in some surprise.

"Sure. De best ain't good enough for Midge."

"Of course he eat's anything he wants?"

"If I got de price, he does. Anyt'ing an' everyt'ing."

"No wonder he's underweight. Why, that's—*criminal!* He must have milk and well-cooked cereal and stewed fruit and——"

"At de Greek's? Say! Ham an' cabbage is his speed. Coffee an' sinkers is de lightest diet he knows de price of."

"Oh, you'll have to cook his food—his breakfasts at least! Perhaps——"

"Who? Me?" Jim stared at the speaker in open dismay. "Me cook? I might take a chance on supper, but—*breakfast?* Why, I ain't up in time! Ain't dere some joint where kids can eat—what's good for 'em, I mean?"

"Yes, several. The Ritz-Carleton is considered pretty good."

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Jimmy Donovan grinned. "All de same, it ain't a bit *too* good for Midge."

"Then there's the Roosevelt Home. Father Mar-ron can tell you——"

"Nix!" Donovan's smile suddenly vanished. "Send dat kid to a Home? Why, he's *mine*! Ben Murray give 'im to me. I'd sooner swop me right eye. Yes, an' a feller told me dey lick kids at dem Homes! For a fact! D'you t'ink I'd leave anybody lay a hand on Midge?"

"All the same, if you can't give him the care and the food he needs, he'll have to be sent where somebody can and will give it to him."

"Oh, I *can* do it," the man reluctantly acknowledged. "I'll do more'n dat for him—I'd loin to hang by me ears, if it would do him any good. All I gotta know is de low-down—what he's gotta have, y'understand? Breakfast? Sure! But Roosevelt Home? Huh! Him an' me is buddies."

"Can you cook?"

"Not a lick. But I got a new four-cylinder oil stove wit' a limousine body."

Kitty frowned prettily—Jim had never realized how much prettier she was at close than at long range—then she said, "Somebody will have to show you. There's a lot to learn and— Come along. I suppose I'll have to get you started."

Here was a fine kettle of fish, Jimmy told himself

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as he led the way to his room. This meant he'd have to get an alarm clock, for Midge was out on the street every morning ahead of the sparrows. Visions of oatmeal pots, milk bottles, dirty dishes, filled him with consternation.

After Kitty had inspected the premises, she took the owner out with her to buy dishes, cooking utensils, and a few necessary supplies, and these she gave him to carry. Now to fetch and to carry at the bidding of a girl—of any girl—was deeply embarrassing to Donovan, for of course the gang was bound to hear about it; nevertheless, the experience was in some ways decidedly pleasant. Kitty Costello was even nicer than people had said she was and she had such a cool, frank, impersonal way of doing things that you couldn't be bashful. She was not like other women, forever giggling and tittering and saying, "Ain't you awful, Mr. Donovan!"

Jim's first cooking lesson was in some ways a hideously trying experience, and yet he loved it, for Kitty's presence, her nearness to him, was an intoxication. When finally she had to go, he mildly ventured the hope that she would look in once and a while and see how the new diet agreed with Midge.

"Why, of course I will!" she told him. "This is only your first lesson and—you're not very bright, are you?"

"Dat's just me way," he protested, with his en-

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gaging crooked grin. "You'd be surprised how easy I pick up some t'ings——" Too late he realized what he had said, and to cover his embarrassment he ran on: "But Midge is bright. Some smart kid, I'll say."

Kitty nodded. Her clear gray eyes were serious, searching. "He is that, and you've got to be careful he doesn't learn to—pick up things he shouldn't."

Jimmy's flush deepened. "I'm goin' to make a square guy of him," he declared, earnestly. "I dunno but I'll send him to college."

"Better send him to church, too."

"Sure! Choich is good for kids, an' anyt'ing good for a kid, he gets."

Not until his caller had gone did Donovan realize that in his confusion he had made a bad break. Kitty herself was a great churchgoer. She was, in fact, Father Marron's right hand; she kept his rectory books in her odd moments, and sometimes she acted as his organist. He hoped she hadn't misunderstood him. Church, of course, was good for women as well as kids.

In the tenement districts of all great cities there are Kitty Costellos—clean-minded, clean-living, hard-working girls; girls who bring sunshine into the shadows, girls who daily tread mire and remain undefiled. This particular Kitty was that sort; her motto was, "Mind your God and your job," and she

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religiously lived up to it, although without any very definite idea just where obligations of the one left off and the other commenced. Most of her time she put in as bookkeeper in a foundry and machine shop, but she managed somehow to have enough left over to do other things—things for which she was paid not in money, but in the smiles of sick mothers, in the laughter of children, in the blind touch of tiny, clinging fingers. Kitty would have been surprised if anyone had called her a welfare worker or a philanthropist, for welfare workers drive around in closed cars and send up word for poor people to come down and receive alms or hints on hygiene, and philanthropists give huge sums of money to institutions. All Kitty had to give was herself and the work of her hands. Following her first visit to Jimmy Donovan's home, it became a part of her weekly routine to teach him how to cook oatmeal and broths and things of that sort.

The Car Barn leader had a reputation for cleverness, but Kitty was astonished at his slowness in learning how to care for Midge. He was always consulting her, always after advice. She had to tell him the same thing time after time. But his gratitude was touching and gratitude invariably thrilled Kitty. The meaning of his stupidity struck her, finally, not because of anything he said or did—he treated her with formal deference and with a

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respect akin to reverence—but because of a realization of her own feelings for him. Her awakening came one Saturday afternoon while she was helping Father Dan Marron with his books of account.

Kitty was in the latter's study when he received a caller in the person of Mr. Lowman Duryea, a real eighteen-karat charity worker of the Park Avenue brand.

Mr. Duryea was an earnest, fervent person and he took his work seriously: he had come to see Father Dan about a small boy in this very parish. Mr. Duryea was connected with the Social Uplift League, a non-sectarian organization, but he felt sure the priest would be glad if he called attention to a poor little Catholic child whose plight he had accidentally discovered in the course of his labors. The lad's name was Murray; he had been left wholly dependent by the death of his brother, an undesirable character from all accounts, and he had fallen into hands even worse—the hands of none other than Jim Donovan, a notorious gang leader.

Kitty Costello laid down her pencil and listened.

"I know," Father Dan was saying. "I know little Midge, and Donovan, too. For the first time in his life the lad is getting enough to eat and clean clothes to wear. I've just made him a choir boy as a reward for his improved appearance and behavior."

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Mr. Duryea was astonished. It was a moment before he could protest. "But the *influence!* Food! Clothes! They're not everything."

"True. But they're a good deal, in this neighborhood, and I wish more of our kids had more of both."

"I—I'm surprised at your attitude," the caller stammered. "The boy is at the impressionable age and—the man is all I said, isn't he?"

"All, and more, I'm afraid. And yet he's genuinely fond of Midge."

"Bosh! Probably the boy amuses him. Probably, too, he's raising him to a life of crime. What else could we expect? I, for one, shan't permit it. His soul is in your hands, Father. If you can't see his danger, there's only one thing for me to do—take his case to the Children's Court. I can at least see that his moral welfare is——"

"Wait!" Kitty Costello broke in abruptly. "You mustn't do that. You—*mustn't!* Father Dan is right; Jimmy Donovan loves the boy and—he's better off where he is. I know. Why, it would kill Midge to be taken away! He's a poor, starved little mite—starved for love and care and attention. Jimmy's giving it to him."

"And teaching him to steal, I've no doubt," Mr. Duryea said, crisply.

"Jimmy isn't a thief! Not a—a regular thief,

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anyhow. I—don't know what he is, but I do know that he's caring for little Midge splendidly and it would be *cruel* to separate them."

"Kitty has been looking after the boy a bit, herself," Father Marron explained.

"*Well!*" Duryea looked from one face to the other. "This *is* surprising, especially in view of the character of——"

"You'll find much to surprise you when you know this parish as Kitty and I know it." The priest pondered for a moment before he went on. "She has it right, in this case, for she sees with the eyes of her soul whereas you and I—you'll pardon me, Mr. Duryea—we're just a couple of stupid men without much to see with except the eyes in our heads. There's all the difference in the world. Jimmy Donovan is a loafer—that's putting it mildly—but he has possibilities—more possibilities than almost any man in this part of town—and while we're engaged in this job of soul-saving, wouldn't it be well to remember that he has one, too?"

"Of course, if you expect him to reform——"

"He has given me no reason to think he'll do that."

"Then I can't subscribe to your attitude." Duryea was growing impatient. "When a man has proven himself to be thoroughly bad——"

Again the priest interrupted: "'Thoroughly bad,'

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eh? Did you ever know anybody—man, woman or child—who was that? I never did, and I've met the worst. Thoroughly bad, is it? D'you know what happened to the old Car Barn gang? D'you know how Donovan came to be leader of this new crowd? Well, I'll tell you. The old gang went to war. They were a wild and lawless bunch and they didn't know there was a war going on, or if they did they paid little attention, being pleasantly engaged in beating up coppers and stealing lead pipe and fighting other gangs and the like. But one day they were rounded up and told about it. They were told also that the young men of America had to work or fight—their country demanded it. You remember that slogan, don't you?

"'Work or fight!' they said. 'Is it goin' as bad as that with our side?'

"'It is,' they were told. 'The Germans are winning.'

"Well, they talked it over between themselves right there; then they said, 'It serves ye right for keepin' this war so quiet, but, now we know about it, things 'll be different right away. You prob'ly got fellers that understand more about workin' than us, but fightin'! That's our dish! Keep this war goin' the best ye can until we can get there. Now then, where's the nearest ticket office?'

"They went over, to the last man, with the Fight-

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ing Sixty-ninth. A lot of them are over there now, under the poppy fields of France. We raise boys like that in these East Side walk-ups, Mr. Duryea, but—some of them are never called. Donovan is one. If ever he is called, he'll go, and I'm praying that some day, somehow, the call will come. Perhaps it will be the voice of little Midge Murray. Who knows? Meanwhile, it seems to me that things might be worse with the lad, for Jimmy is keeping his belly full of food, Kitty's teaching him to sing, and I'm doing the best I can to let him know there's a loving God. It was nice of you to come, however."

When Kitty went home that night she knew what had happened to her. She knew why it gave her more joy to do for Midge and Jimmy than for others, and she wondered why she had not realized the truth long before. She knew, too, why Jimmy had pretended to be so stupid. Of course he loved her, blindly, devotedly, hopelessly; he had shown it in a thousand ways. What else could explain his gentleness, his shyness, the tones of his voice when he spoke to her? And of course he would never tell her. She knew him too well for that. And he knew her. But what a wretched state of affairs! It completely destroyed Kitty's opinion of herself, for she felt certain that no really nice girl, no honest, high-principled girl, could care for a—a crook, even though he were a sort of Robin Hood and had eyes

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of Irish blue and a smile that tugged at women's heartstrings. He *was* a crook. She repeated the word aloud, tasting its bitter flavor—crook, crook, crook! She arranged her little errands of mercy thereafter so that they took her elsewhere, but when necessity forced her to pass the building where Jimmy and Midge lived, she hurried, for invariably a panic overtook her.

Mrs. Sheehan had just had her fifth and things were not altogether well with her. Mr. Sheehan worked nights and had little to do with, so Kitty Costello, after her hours at the office, had been doing the housework and looking after the little one together with the third and fourth Sheehan children, who were still too young to look after themselves. This evening the mother herself required more than the usual amount of attention, for during the day she had become convinced that she was going to die, and that conviction had grown hourly. She could not be talked out of it, so when she tearfully demanded Father Marron, Kitty fetched him.

She and Father Dan sat until after midnight with the sick woman, and between them they quieted her so that she dozed off. Noting the pallor of weariness in Kitty's cheeks and the droop of her tired shoulders, the priest at last whispered to her:

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"Run along home, now, and get some sleep, my dear."

Kitty roused herself with an effort; then she shook her head. "It's too late—too dark. I'd rather wait for you."

Father Dan regarded her curiously. Here was something new—Kitty Costello afraid of the dark! He asked her what she feared.

After some hesitation she told him: "That fellow Miller lives next door and nearly every time I've come in or gone out I've—he's—spoken to me. If you don't mind, I'll wait."

"But I do mind. I'll not have you sick. Why, the whole parish would be on my hands! I spoke to Donovan. That Miller wretch wouldn't dare molest you. If it would make you feel easier I'll watch you up the block from the window there. Be a good girl now and run home. I'll be sitting here for hours yet."

Kitty was indeed fagged, so she did as directed. Father Dan listened to her descending the stairs and smiled gently. As if any man in this neighborhood would accost that girl, no matter what the hour or the circumstance! Certainly none of the Car Barn gang would do so, for it was a matter of honor with them never to annoy women. Just to reassure her he stepped to the window, cupped his hands over his eyes, and peered down into the street. He stood

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so for a moment, then with a smothered cry he turned and in two strides he was out of the room. He vaulted the railing that fenced in the narrow stair well and landed halfway down to the next floor; he fetched up at the street level with the crash of a falling body; then he was out upon the sidewalk. The street was empty; he crossed it flying to where Kitty stood backed into a doorway, her face blazing defiance at Cokey Joe Miller and two of his pals.

The ruffians heard him coming and turned, but too late. Father Dan was upon them and he came, not as a priest, but as a man. Miller he sent sprawling he knew not how; then when one of the others flung up his arms in defiance Father Dan floored him, too. It was a mighty blow and it carried all the weight of his big body behind it. He turned, raging, upon the remaining member of the trio, one Monk Manelli, but recognition had been mutual and the amorous Mr. Manelli was in flight.

"Come back!" Father Dan shouted. "Come back, you dirty, cowardly——!" Miller was scrambling to his feet; the tall priest stooped and helped him up by the collar, then holding him in his two hands he gave vent to his fury by shaking the pallid wretch until his head rolled limply and his limbs snapped and whipped as if the bones within them were made of rope. He flung Cokey Joe away from him finally, crying: "I can't bear the feel of you! Get up and

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get out, quick! Both of you. Get out of this neighborhood and stay out, d'you understand? There's no room here for vermin like you. Yes, and I'm going to make it my business to see that you go to-night. Come along, Kitty."

Panting, muttering, rumbling angrily in his throat, Father Dan took the girl by the arm and fairly ran with her to her door, then without a word he turned and made swiftly back whence they had come. He knew where that precious trio would be found. He did not slacken his pace until he had reached the building in which the gang maintained its headquarters. He took the stairs three steps at a time; the door to the clubroom flew open beneath his blow and there, sure enough, he found the men he sought.

They had just come in. Cokey Joe was still pretty shaky and several of his friends had gathered around him. They looked up, startled, as the door crashed back upon its hinges.

"Where's Donovan?" Father Dan demanded, loudly.

The tone of this inquiry, the manner of the priest's entrance, awoke instant resentment among the gangsters, but one of them managed to answer, civilly enough:

"He ain't here, Father. What's wrong?"

"There's a lot wrong, and I propose to fix it, right here and now." Father Dan strode across the floor,

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his jaw set, a scowl upon his heavy face. His eyes were blazing. "Since when have you rowdies taken to insulting decent girls on the street? Answer me!" There was no answer, merely an uneasy shifting of feet and an exchange of glances. "Think you can get away with *that*, do you? Think nobody can get your hides, eh? Well, *I* can. I'm going to take three of you out of here, right now, and they're not coming back. Come on, you"—he indicated Cokey Joe—"and you, Monk, and that other fellow there. Quick!"

"Say, looka here!" Manelli protested. "What's the idea, buttin' into private propity? This is a clubroom." Gaining confidence from the sound of his own voice, he went on more defiantly: "Are you a cop, or somethin'? Where's yer warrant? There's no harm kiddin' a girl. Girls like to be kidded——"

With a swift movement Father Marron seized the gangster by the throat and thrust him back against the wall. He raised his hard-knuckled fist and in a voice of fury he cried:

"Don't take that tone to me!"

"Easy, Father!" somebody exclaimed. "Monk's all right. He didn't mean nothin'. W'at's all de excitement, anyhow?"

"Sure! What's goin' on?" The voice was Jimmy Donovan's. He had seen the priest enter the build-

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ing; he stood in the open doorway now, eyeing the scene with cold disfavor. "Why all de rough stuff?"

"I'll tell you why," the priest stormed. And he did. He could use harsh words, words with splinters in them, when aroused, could Father Dan, and now he fairly took the skin off his listeners. His indignation scalded them, his scorn was like salt rubbed into raw sores, for the Car Barn boys had a sort of pride. First he relieved himself of a few things he had long wanted to tell them, and although they growled and muttered, their respect for his cloth was potent. Then he recounted precisely what had happened a quarter of an hour before.

Jimmy Donovan had flamed with quick resentment at discovering the priest here, in a fighting mood, but as Father Dan told of the attack upon Kitty Costello he turned faint, sick; his face whitened, there came a roaring in his ears so loud that the priest's strident voice was no more than a murmur—like the sound of the sea at Coney Island. Kitty! If only it had been any girl except Kitty. This was the end; the knockout.

Gradually the roaring subsided, he heard Father Dan's bitter words.

"Father!" Jimmy did not speak loudly, nevertheless something in his voice drew all eyes away from the priest. Father Marron had seen men deeply moved and by emotions of various sorts; never be-

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fore, however, had he looked into a man's face and beheld murder so plainly written there. But there could be no mistaking Jim's intent. "T'ank ye for comin' up an' puttin' us wise. It's all right. Dey was just kiddin'." He turned his head slowly toward Cokey Joe and his two companions; the movement was like the turning of a snake's head. "Tell' her, will ye, dey was just kiddin'? She's been awful good to my Midge. She's awful good to everybody. Make her understand it was only a joke."

"You assured me it would never happen again, so—I came right here to headquarters," the priest said, in a calmer tone. Dimly he realized that Donovan had taken this affair upon his shoulders and would attend to it in his own way, but of a sudden that prospect awoke misgivings.

"Sure! I gave ye me woid—me oath to God—an' I been made a bum of. Dey made a bum of me gang, too."

"What are you going to do about it?" the visitor inquired, after a moment of silence.

Donovan smiled, and Father Dan understood more clearly what it was in this dapper, quiet-mannered young fellow that had won him his czardom over these hard-boiled men. It was a mirthless, baleful smile, and it shockingly distorted Donovan's pleasant features. He was all evil now, all cruelty, and the passion within him was the more terrible by reason

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of its momentary restraint. "Come along," said he. "Dis ain't no place for youse."

Father Marron held back. His voice was quite normal for the first time when he said, "I'll go—but on one condition." The head gangster eyed him with a blank stare. Plainly his mind was upon the guilty trio. "I'll go if you'll go with me." Jim shook his head impatiently. "Please! As far as the rectory. You—you can't *throw* me out."

For an instant Donovan's rage escaped him. "For the love o' God, *go!*" he cried, hoarsely.

"You can come back. I'll not ask you to promise anything." Father Dan linked his arm in that of the gangster and drew him toward the door. "It's a grand night and we both need the air. I've no business standing around your elegant club house and putting a churchly pall on your enjoyment, but I'll be hanging around until daylight, cracking jokes and telling stories to cover up my fear of the dark, unless you take me home. Come along now."

Donovan went, unsmilingly. He turned at the door to say, evenly, "Stick around, youse! I won't be long."

Nobody ever heard what Father Dan Marron had to say during that slow walk to the rectory. Jimmy Donovan himself could not have told, for he remembered little, but when he returned, fifteen minutes

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later, three members of the Car Barn gang had disappeared.

A natural curiosity as to the fate of Cokey Joe Miller and his two companions induced Father Marron to look up Jimmy Donovan a few days later. It was a bright, clear spring afternoon; the sun sparkled upon the waters of the East River and out of the wind it was warm enough for comfortable loafing. The gang was down on the water front; they rose respectfully at the priest's approach.

"Sit down," he told them, "or crowd over and make room for one more. I've been thinking I owe you boys an apology for my display of temper the other night. It was nice of you to treat me so politely."

"I'm polite to anny guy wit' a good right hook," said Spike Doyle. A crooked nose and cauliflower ear proclaimed the reason for Mr. Doyle's respect. "It's me fav'rite sleep mixture."

"Yeah! An' dey don't have to be so good, neider," some one said, at which there was general laughter.

Some months before, be it said, Spike, with a chain of victories at a local club behind him, had appeared at Madison Square Garden under the high-sounding but inaccurate *nom de guerre* of "The Hell Gate Terror." There he had met a Jersey City

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second-rater by the name of Horace Smith, who had given him ten pounds and the beating of his life, which explains the lack of sympathy of his fellow gangsters.

"I keep in pretty good shape for a man in my business," the priest told him. He flexed his arm and Spike felt of its muscles. "My wind isn't much, but I guess I could go two or three fast ones if I had to. By the way, when do you get a return match with that Jersey City lad? The papers said you had all the best of the first four rounds. I figured we were going to have a welterweight champion here on East Ninetieth Street."

"Sure I had de best of it. Didn't I, fellers? Dat Smit' kid ain't got a t'ing in eider mit. De boys 'll tell ye."

"Nuttin' but a vitrified brick," said Jimmy Donovan. "I dunno what he packs in his left hand, but I lose eighty smackers on what he had in his right."

"A good left will beat a right any day," Father Dan declared, and Spike agreed. Mr. Doyle was grateful to anyone who championed his cause, even indirectly, and promptly he launched himself into an elaborate post-mortem of the disastrous affray at the Garden. This Jersey bozo, according to him, was smeared with luck, that was all, and he, Spike, had underestimated him. Nothing but his own carelessness had been to blame for his defeat, but

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a man's wife could knock him out if he happened to be reading the evening paper or if he was looking out of a window. Father Dan would admit that.

The conversation became general; from pugilism it shifted to baseball and the reports from the spring training camps; to Meusel's batting and to McGraw's latest trade, Father Marron joined in freely and proved able to argue intelligently on any phase of the game. He passed around cigars and lit one himself. The gang had warmed up to him by now and had decided he was a regular fellow, but he waited in vain for any reference to Cokey Joe and the other absent men.

The priest had been aware from the first that Donovan was unusually quiet, even absent minded, to-day, and finally he asked the reason.

Jimmy told him, frankly enough: he was perishing of boredom; life was one long yawn. "De neighborhood's on de bum. You couldn't start a hubbub if Brian Boru was on one side o' de street an' Eddie Carson's army was on de udder."

"Boredom is a hideous thing," the priest agreed.

"It's de fault of de cops we got, nowadays. Floor-walkers! If one of em spoils de shine on his finger nails he cries himself to sleep. Dey don't pinch you no more; some dare-devil hands you an engraved invitation askin' you please to attend a party down at Gen'ral Sessions, an' kindly answer by bearer.

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Dey've adopted an official police-force flower—de wild rose."

"You're craving excitement, I take it? Something with a thrill?"

"You got it. I've forgot de meanin' o' de woid."

"Hm-m! I've been thinking about a new line for you, but"— Father Dan shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know as you'd care to go through with it."

"Why not?"

"Well, because it would take—nerve."

Donovan stared at the speaker. So did the others. "Noive! It sounds good, don't it, fellers?"

"I'm afraid it would take more than you've got."

"If Jim ain't got enough, who has?" demanded Doyle.

"Sure, if it's dat good, spill it," Donovan urged.

"All right. I was just thinking that it would give you a new sensation and maybe a thrill to come to vespers Sunday night and hear me preach."

There was a shout of laughter at this. Father Dan, it appeared, was a good two-handed kidder and the gang enjoyed their leader's discomfiture. It wasn't often they had a laugh at Jim's expense.

"I'm going to talk on a subject that will interest you."

But Jim shook his head positively. "Nix, Father! Choich is fine for women, but I ain't been since I was confoimed."

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"I didn't expect you to come. In fact, I knew you wouldn't."

"Why?"

"Well, because I felt sure you were—yellow."

There was a momentary hush, then Donovan said, soberly, "Dat's kind of a bum joke."

"It's no joke," said the priest as he rose. "I mean it."

"Wait!" Donovan stopped him as he moved away. "Yeller, is it? Me yellor! You're on; I'll be dere!"

"Atta boy, Jim!" somebody exclaimed, gleefully.

"Give 'im the woiks; t'row de book at 'im while ye got 'im dere, Father," another urged.

"Yes, an' de gang 'll be wit' me," Jim declared, venomously.

There came a howling chorus of protest at this: "Hey, Jimmy!" "Not'in' doin'!" "How d'you get like dat?"

"Dey'll be dere," Donovan firmly repeated. "Dem as ain't will be in Bellevue."

Father Dan left them indignantly arguing the matter with their leader.

When Jim took time, later on, to consider Father Marron's artifice, he did not think much of it; priests, it seemed to him, had a pretty punk sense of humor. Of course he'd go, for nobody could stand being called yellow, but as for thrills, as for

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excitement—that was to laugh. His kind of excitement was not to be found in churches. No, he had been let in for a stupid and an embarrassing evening, but there was nothing to do except make the best of it. He was compensated by one thought—Kitty Costello would be there, for she was the organist, and it would be worth something just to see her, merely to sit and watch her from a distance. Father Dan's preaching would have to be pretty rotten to spoil that.

Of course Midge would be tickled pink, too, for the boy had been trying lately to induce him to go and hear him sing, but Jim had stalled. As he thought things over now, it struck him that he was stalling the kid more and more lately—a thing he did not enjoy doing. He would have greatly preferred to be strictly on the square with the boy, for Midge himself was so straightforward, but that was the penalty of trying to raise a kid right—you had to practically live a lie. Jimmy did not like to lie—except to coppers. It was no crime to lie to them—in fact, it was the thing to do; it was kind of smart. It seemed to him, however, now that he considered it calmly, that lying to little boys was pretty small business, and for some time he racked his brains to discover a method of avoiding the necessity. But he was unsuccessful.

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Had a band of Zulu warriors in monkey-fur anklets and parrot-plume headgear filed in out of the street the next Sunday evening they would have caused no greater sensation among the members of Father Marron's congregation than did the Car Barn gang when they came to vespers. Occupants of the rear-most pews suffered consternation, nay, panic, when Donovan's men appeared, genuflected awkwardly, and took seats. Even those worshipers farther forward turned, craned their necks, then bent their heads together and—so it seemed to Jimmy—the very air of the place became filled with sibilant whisperings. He felt sure that if he turned his stony gaze to right or to left he would discover worthy East Side residents in the act of hurriedly removing watches, wallets, and stickpins and burying them in their shoes, and it made him hot under the collar to note how late arrivals who slid into seats near him and his friends suddenly changed their minds and moved elsewhere. One man actually tripped over his own feet in his haste to seek another pew. Jim began to feel as if he and his companions had smallpox. Some reputation for a gang when its members couldn't be trusted even in church!

Of course there were a few comedians among the boys—fellows who had never attended a service—and they tried out some of their stuff, but Donovan discouraged them with a poisonous glare and they

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promptly subsided. By the time the Psalms and the Capitulum had been sung, Jim's first burning self-consciousness had cooled and he made bold to look about him. The church was beautiful, restful; it had an atmosphere that made itself felt. The glowing lights, the dignified, high-springing arches, the pure white Tabernacle, the figures of acolytes and torch bearers in cassocks and surplices, all were impressive, all appealed to Jim's Irish love of pageantry. Something about the imposing ceremony of the service struck a responsive chord in him, too, and he experienced an agreeable sense of familiarity with what was going on. His memory surprised him.

A hymn was sung and he fancied he could distinguish Midge's voice among the others, but he did not turn his head to look. When the incensing of the altar had been finished, he told himself that the Church—his Church—certainly put on a good show—a darn sight better show, he was sure, than the Protestants or the Jews. Of course, the wop lingo was queer, but it lent both dignity and mystery to the ritual, and religion is something you don't want to get too familiar with, anyhow.

When it came time for the sermon, Jim was pleased to note that Father Marron talked to, and not at, his congregation, and to realize that it didn't take a highbrow to understand what he said. Even

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the slant-head members of the gang could get what he was telling them. As nearly as Jim could make out, the text of the sermon was that it takes a tough guy to go straight and the very novelty of the idea challenged his attention. Father Dan was all wrong, of course, for it was a cinch to run straight, otherwise why did all the suckers do it? Nevertheless, the priest made out a pretty good case—good enough, at least, for a bunch of boobs like these. Outside of Jim and his pals, there wasn't a wise guy in the audience.

There was something else in the sermon, however, that hit Jim squarely and interested him far more than this fallacious text; that was Father Dan's talk about the Big Brothers. Jim had never heard of the organization, in fact had no idea of the meaning of the movement, but when it was explained so that he grasped it, he sat up. Anything to do with kids or with the proper way of raising them struck home and was better than the best sermon ever preached. Here, for once, was common sense coming from the pulpit. Children are the first asset of our nation. If we go to elaborate cost and pains to conserve our coal and our timber and our grain—all our natural resources, in short—why not take equal pains and spend at least an equal sum to conserve the most vital, the most precious resource of all, the youth of our country? There was a

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thought. Mines, lumber, land, wheat—are they worth as much as boys? Why save them and waste our children? Instead of spending enormous sums to punish crime, why not devote a part of that money to crime prevention and thus avoid the necessity of penitentiaries, and cut down the tremendous overhead of our elaborate punitive system? It can be done. Father Dan was firm on this point—and Jimmy Donovan felt like crying: “Atta boy! You said a mouthful!”

No one knew better than the gangster what dangers beset city boys and the blighting effect of criminal associations during their formative years. He had taken that whole course in person and his concern for little Midge had cost him much peace of mind lately. What is more, he knew the evils that follow the law’s corrective measures and it was his private belief that crime at its worst is not so bad as the effect of the laws against it. He had seen youths, and men, too, come out of jail so much worse than when they went in that he felt sure those reformatories worked infinitely more harm than good, effected ruin more often than reform. For that reason he detested the entire legal machinery of coppers and courts and prisons and the like, and included in his detestation the so-called “goody-goody” people who are in favor of them. He considered the whole device an inhuman engine of de-

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struction, a juggernaut into the cogs of which it is any man's privilege to cast a monkey wrench.

Jim had never bothered to think very clearly along these lines, but it was about thus that his mind had worked; and to learn now from Father Dan that these "good" people who were at the bottom of the whole thing shared his ideas about courts and prisons surprised him. To be told that they actually had taken measures to help wayward boys, had devised a means of defeating those very laws, astonished him even more and raised them considerably in his estimation.

He followed the priest's description of an actual case at the Juvenile Court—the case of a boy arrested for theft. His father was a drunkard and he himself was a pitiful product of neglect—a cornered, frightened, bewildered little creature who had been led to believe that every man's hand was against him. His guilt had been established and the law had exacted its penalty; he had been sentenced to a reformatory—crematory was a better name, according to Father Dan, since so often those institutions consume the youth that enters and turn out useless, bitter ash—when the League had intervened. It had offered to take the boy, stand good for him, find him a home, and appoint a Big Brother who would look out for him and be a decent, guiding influence.

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Jim thrilled as he listened to the happy outcome of that case. If this was religion, his ideas of it had been all wrong.

There were Big Brothers in this audience, men who loved kids and were willing to sacrifice themselves to the ideals of the organization; it was to them, in fact, that Father Dan was talking; and Jim began to experience a warm, brotherly feeling for the people in this church—the very people he had hated when he came in. He, too, was a Big Brother; he was as much of a hero as any one of them, for he was doing the same sort of thing for his Midge.

The sermon was over before he knew it and then came the big punch of the evening. Midge sang a solo.

At the first note Jim started, ceased breathing; for a moment it seemed to him that the whole church had begun to revolve and he felt himself to be in danger of falling out of his pew. The idea of Midge, his Midge, singing alone, in this place, and to all these people! And they were listening, too. Why, the boy was a part of the service, like Father Dan! There was something hallowed about him; you could hear it in his voice. It wasn't a boy's voice at all, it was the voice of an angel, and it stirred emotions impossible to describe. They hurt and yet they were ineffably sweet.

Members of the gang who watched Jimmy saw

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a great wonder, a great pride, a great gladness, come into his face; slowly, as if twisted by some invisible hand, he turned until his shining eyes rested upon the singer.

In Father Marron's church the choir loft is not in the gallery, but at the rear between the entrances, hence the singers, and the organist, too, are visible from all parts of the floor if one turns to look.

Moments of exaltation come to everybody, moments of peculiar emotional fervor—they are the stirrings of the soul, perhaps—and such a moment Jimmy Donovan experienced now. It must be remembered that generations of devout worshipers were back of him and that he had inherited certain religious tendencies, even superstitions; at any rate, when he saw little Midge in his snowy surplice he could swear that a mysterious white light suffused the boy. Nor had Midge ever sung like this before; it was indeed the voice of the cherubim that issued from his throat.

Jim had experienced many thrills, but never anything that stirred him, startled him, so deeply as this when, it seemed to him, the veil parted before his mortal eyes and he looked straight up to the throne of God.

He left the church in a daze; he was unaware of bidding the gang good night, but found himself later wandering the streets alone and in a mood such

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as he had never experienced. He was tired, limp as a rag, and yet he had never been more restless, more wide awake, more unsatisfied, than now. The vision of a child in white, a holy child, a Christ Child, was burned into his mind and he could not rid himself of it. Sleep was impossible so long as it persisted so vividly.

It was late when he tiptoed into his room and stood over Midge's bed. Even yet there was a halo about the boy's head; the very pillow upon which it rested glowed with a soft radiance that somehow did not seem to come from the reflection of the street lamps below. Jim told himself that he'd be seeing pink lizards and yellow crocodiles next and would have to be tied down to his bed.

During the next week the gang saw little of their leader, for he had developed a grouch worse than his previous irritation and boredom, and he kept to himself. It was a trying week for the gangster. Father Dan had certainly put a jinx on him. It served him right for going to church. He wondered if he would ever learn to refuse a dare. For a long time now he had been deeply dissatisfied with everything and with everybody except himself; but ever since his queer experience of Sunday evening he included himself in his general dissatisfaction. Why he felt that way he could not explain. For one thing, his conceit had been punctured. Although

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he had never mentioned the matter, he nevertheless believed he had done something pretty fine in taking care of Midge Murray as well as he had, and that he deserved a good deal of credit therefor. It had given him a comfortable feeling of superiority, a pleasant sense of martyrdom. To learn that these "soft guys" to whom he was superior were doing the same thing as he and doing it better—yes, and without boasting—was a disagreeable surprise. Then, too, his sight of Kitty Costello had awakened poignant yearnings and had stimulated him to round out thoughts that had lain half formed in his mind until now. He was a clean-living, smooth-running piece of work and a girl could do a lot worse—Kitty was perhaps the one girl in the world who could completely change his mode of living, for whom it would be worth while to run straight; but he had noted an astonishing thing about her at the service. She, too, had glowed with that subdued radiance that had enveloped Midge. Saints in church windows were garbed in that same fire, and the phenomenon had invested her with a kind of holiness. Since she was not ordinary human flesh and blood, it was useless to dwell upon foolish fancies. But it left the young man restless, empty, dissatisfied. In spite of his moping and sighing, he arrived nowhere except at a firm decision never to reform. Kitty was out of reach, anyhow, so what

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was the use? As for Midge, he'd do the best he could for the lad and meanwhile have a good time. It was some satisfaction to be a tough bird.

He returned home one afternoon, much earlier than usual, and was surprised to discover from the sound of voices in his room that Midge had a caller. Instinctive caution prompted him to learn who the latter might be, so he approached the door on tiptoe and listened. A moment, then he frowned in perplexity, for it was Cokey Joe Miller speaking. What dire necessity had brought him here? Jim bent his head again, and this time what he heard caused him to reach for his hip pocket. He could scarcely believe his ears, but—if they were not playing him tricks it was lucky he had come when he did. Miller was trying to induce Midge to take dope! Jim listened, stupefied. He had to get all of this; it would not do to make a mistake.

Either the fellow was crazed with his own drugs or this was his way of getting revenge; at any rate, he was telling Midge about the glories of Coney Island and the boy was ablaze with excitement.

"Me, I go every day, an' it don't cost me a cent," the man was saying. "All I do is sniff dis here powder an' I see de hull woiks, hear de music an' ever't'ing. G'wan, kid, try it!"

The door flew open. Miller leaped to his feet, startled.

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"Hello, Jim! I just——" The words died in his throat as he met Donovan's flaming eyes. "I—You— No need of us bein' sore, Jim. I——"

"Did he sniff dat stuff?" Donovan jerked his head in Midge's direction. "Come clean! I been listenin'. *Did* he?"

Cokey Joe uttered a bleat of terror and recoiled violently, for Jim had drawn his gun. "Look out!" the caller cried, sharply. "Nix, Jim! I didn't mean nuttin'. Y-ye wouldn't croak a pal——?"

"You—*rat!*" Jim was shaking uncontrollably; he was ill, nauseated. A hunter who treads upon a rattlesnake feels the same sensation—one of mingled fright and repulsion that frequently turns him sick at his stomach. In the back of Donovan's mind, however, ran the last words of Big Ben Murray: "If any one tries to loin 'im anyt'ing rotten—molder 'em." He had never killed a man; he had always refused to think of doing so; now, however, he raised his revolver.

Midge pushed it aside, crying: "Hey, Jimmy! Can dat movie stuff. Dem t'ings goes off an' hoits people." The boy was trying to appear brave and to treat the situation lightly, but his eyes were big with fright and his little hands were cold.

Jim stared down at him for an instant, and sight of the child's strained white face restored some sort of sanity to him. He couldn't kill Miller here, right

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before this kid's eyes. He stood frozen, then he lowered the weapon. "I'm only foolin'," he said, harshly. "Just t'rowin' a scare——" He swallowed twice, then addressed the cowering wretch. "Come along, hop-head. Let's take a walk."

But Miller's terror rendered him epileptic. His lips hung loose and wet, his eyes rolled, his arms moved jerkily. He babbled an incoherent plea for mercy. He had meant no harm; . . . he had come to see Jim and make up; . . . he and Midge were good pals and as God was his judge he wouldn't hurt a kid. . . . Midge wouldn't let Jimmy hurt him either. Would he? The creature came forward on wabbling legs and pawed at the child.

"Leggo dat kid! Don't touch 'im." Jim flung the fellow aside and cursed him furiously. It was the first time he had ever used profanity before Midge and the latter listened terrified, thunder-struck. When Jim tried to drag Miller out of the room, Midge clung to him and began to cry.

"All right. De kid wins." Jim released his hold. "Beat it! But I'll get you. Dere ain't a hole in dis town you can hide in, you know dat. Take it on de loop now, quick, an' keep fulla snow; 'cause you'll need it. Your number's out, Joe."

Still chattering his apologies, the drug addict slunk out of the room and half fell down the stairs. It was hard to let him go, for Jim was unaccus-

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tomed to self-restraint. And there was his oath to Big Ben!

When the door had closed, Donovan whirled upon the boy, crying savagely, "Takin' dope, hey? Ain't I told you to be good? I'll learn ye to do a rotten t'ing like dat." He raised his hand and cuffed Midge across the room. The little fellow fetched up against the bed, clung to it dizzily for a moment, then clambered upon it and sat down. His eyes slowly filmed over with tears, his lower lip began to quiver.

Briefly the two regarded each other, the boy hurt, bewildered, reproachful; the man beside himself with horror at what had just passed. For a moment they stared at each other, then Donovan uttered a sharp cry.

"Oh, kid! I'm—sorry. I'm off me nut, honest! *You* ain't done nuttin'. Here"—he stepped forward and knelt before Midge—"hit me back. I hadn't oughta struck ye. G'wan! Hit me." He thrust his face forward and Midge could feel the bed shake from the clutch of his trembling hands.

"I don't wanta hit ya," the lad quavered.

"Sure ye do! Gimme a wallop in', like a good boy. Hit me anywhere, much as ye please. It's comin' to me. I was crazy, Midge—him tryin' a t'ing like dat an'—an'—I dunno what ailed me."

"I been licked lots o' times. I don't mind it."

Jim closed his eyes; his face was suddenly con-

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vulsed. "I was rotten. G'wan, hand it to me hard. I *want* ye to. It's fifty-fifty wit' us. *Please*, kid!" In his present agony of remorse Donovan longed fiercely to feel Midge's fists upon his flesh, but instead he felt the boy's arms encircle his neck, felt the little fellow's lips pressed to his. With an aching cry Jimmy crushed the tiny figure to him, held it close. It seemed as if his heart would break from the pain, the melting, exquisite anguish within him.

"I couldn't hit *you*, Jimmy," Midge was murmuring. "Gee! I like ya too much."

"*Do* ye? Honest?"

"Sure. An' you needn't be scared I'll do anyt'ing rotten. I'm gonna be just like you."

"O God! I *am* scared."

"You was mad, too, wasn't ya, Jimmy? I'll tell the woid you was." Midge was delighted that concern for his own safety had inspired such violence of passion. "You'd 'a' croaked him, wouldn't ya, Jim?"

"I'd 'a' gone to de chair, dat's all. Dat's awful stuff he give ye."

"Hully Gee! De cops would 'a' got ya an' I'd 'a' been left flat. Dat would 'a' been fierce, wouldn't it?"

Jim clutched the boy close again. "You an' me is brothers, eh, Midge?"

"Sure, we're brudders."

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"We're gonna allus be brothers—allus like dis, eh? Ain't nuttin' ever goin' to split us apart, *ever*. Promise not to let nuttin' or nobody in dis hull woild split us apart."

"Not a chance! *Geel*!"

"An'—an' ye better not say I kissed ye, Midge. *You* know!"

"All right. I useta kiss Ben once in a w'ile, an' it made him sore, too."

"Oh, it don't make me sore. I *like* it. But—Say! Let's us go down to Coney, soon as it opens. Just you an' me. We'll see de hull t'ing, an' ride de camels, an' eat dogs. An' we won't go Cokey Joe's route, neither. Yeah, an' to-night we'll get a big feed at de Greek's an' go see a pitcher—*two* of 'em. You an' me have got to knock around together after dis; New York's a rotten town fer a kid unless he's got a big brother."

Kitty Costello was surprised when, one Saturday afternoon, she entered Father Marron's study and found Jimmy Donovan waiting there.

"Oh! Excuse me," she exclaimed in some confusion.

"Don't duck," the gangster implored as she started to back out. "I'm in a panic an' I'd 'a' beat it meself in another minute."

Something in the speaker's voice drew Kitty's

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averted eyes to his face; a searching look, then she forgot herself entirely.

"Why—you're in trouble! What is it?" Plainly something was amiss with Jim, for he was gray and haggard and there was a strained, hunted look in his face. "You haven't—done something? They're not after you?" Kitty spoke breathlessly; one of her hands fluttered to her throat.

The man nodded. "I'm in trouble, awright! An' somet'ing's after me—I dunno what. Yeah! An' it's got me. Gee! I ain't slep' a wink for t'ree nights. Been walkin' de streets. I gotta spill it to somebody an' I dunno's Father Dan would understand as good as you. It's about Midge. You can talk to me here. Nobody 'll see you."

"What is it?"

"It's jus' dis. I——" Jim wet his lips, he twisted his cap—wrung it between his hands. "I'm gonna run straight."

"You're—*what?*"

"I gotta do it," he declared, in a cracked voice. "It's me only out. I've figgered it all ways, but I'm boxed in. Listen! Dat guy Miller tried to lay de kid ag'in' de coke; tried to get him sniffin'. Fact! I caught 'im at it—an' a miracle it was. I was for smokin' him right dere. God! It boined me up—teachin' a kid to do a t'ing like dat. But you can't kill a guy in front of a boy any more 'n you could

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kill 'im in choich. I had to let 'im walk out. But dat's only one t'ing. Every day it's somet'ing; every way I toin I see somebody willin' to loin 'im somet'ing rotten. I been worried for weeks an' me nut's sore, I used it so much. Midge t'inks I give orders to Hylan, an' built de Brooklyn Bridge, an' wrote de Bible, an'—well, I'm aces wit' 'im, see? He's got an idea de Car Barn gang is somet'ing like de Board o' Aldermen, only more class.

“You can't fool a kid like him for long; he's gonna get me number sure. An' den what? I'll tell ye what; he's gonna say anyt'ing Jimmy Donovan does is good enough for him. Get me? I can't make a square guy outa him unless I'm square meself. You know kids. He'll t'ink it's great to be a ten-minute egg like me. Sure he will. I was a kid like him, meself, but I had a knack. Ain't one guy in a t'ousan' can beat de game like I done, an' if ye can't beat it ye better be sorry you're born.”

Jim paused to catch his breath, then gloomily he continued: “I gotta toin over de well-known leaf. I been fightin' it, but I'm licked. If I'm straight, I can beat hell outa him de foist trick he toins, but if I'm crooked—— Get me?”

“I'm—glad,” quavered Kitty Costello.

“Understand, I'm rotten as ever, inside. When I seen meself slippin' I went wild. I ribbed up de gang to—to somet'ing fierce. Dat was two days ago.

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Gee! we took a chance! But I knew I was gone. You got it now: I've fell for de straight an' narrow—an' it *makes—me—sick!* Kind of a come-down for a man my size, ain't it?"

"No! No! It's splendid!" the girl said, earnestly. "Father Dan will be so happy."

"Honest?"

"Indeed he will, and so will—everybody. You'll get a job, of course."

"Oh, sure!" The tone was one of mingled disgust and resignation. "Dat's de foist t'ing a sucker does. I ain't made up me mind what it 'll be, but a boid smart enough to get by wit'out woikin' had ought to start a panic in 'most any business he picks out." He smiled whimsically. "Mebbe I'll join de priest force an' get to be a bishop so's I can promote Father Marron to pope. Who knows? You talk to 'im, will ye? Please! Me head's tired an' I'm talked out. He says it takes a tough guy to run straight; ask 'im if he t'inks I'm tough enough."

Kitty was only too glad to be the bearer of such tidings, and when Father Dan had heard her he joined in her rejoicing.

"This is a happy day for me," he confessed. "A boy's hands have built an altar in that man's heart where ours would have failed. I'm not much of a preacher and I know less about business, but I'm

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going to find Donovan a job if it's the last thing I do."

"The job is found," Kitty asserted, with shining eyes, "if you'll only go down to the plant with me on Monday morning."

Jimmy Donovan never knew to whom he owed his first position. He attributed his prompt acceptance as an employee of the McConnigle shops to an appreciation of himself as a man. Nor, if the truth be known, did Father Marron have much to do with it except to vouch for the integrity of Jim's determination; the rest was due to Kitty, who stood quite as well with her firm as with her neighbors.

Jim's first few weeks of honest toil were trying enough to his pride, for he felt degraded, conspicuous. He had come down in the social scale and he was sure the entire upper East Side, underneath its calm, was seething with excitement over it. When signs of that agitation failed to manifest themselves, he was genuinely relieved. As for the Car Barn gang, they took it better than he expected and sentiment was about evenly divided as to the wisdom of his course. Big Ben had been well beloved and the gang as a whole vaguely felt that it had inherited a certain responsibility for Midge. Some few of the boys, to be sure, were rather contemptuous of Jim's attitude, but they were fellows who had no little

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brothers of their own and Spike Doyle pretty well put the concensus of opinion when he said:

"It ain't like it would be if Jim had fell for Billy Sunday an' was horrified at his evil ways, or like he'd gone to stoolin' fer de cops. He's a hunnerd per cent right, he is, an' you could split 'im wit' a wedge before he'd toin up a pal or squawk at an enemy. You heard what he promised Big Ben? Well, he's a gangster an' he's got de guts to go t'rough fer a buddy. Yeah! An' it takes a lighter-load o' insides to do dat. A soft-livin' lad like him dat 'll go to woik in a foundry is a hero an' he'd oughta be starred in moompitchers."

This was a friendly attitude indeed and it saved Jim's self-respect—what was left of it. It would have hurt him terribly had the gang turned against him. As time passed he grew easier in mind and began to take an interest in his job. He possessed a mechanical bent, anyhow; hence there was a fascination about the work in the shop and it was not long until he decided to acquire enough proficiency so as to take charge of a lathe. The intricacies of those machines, their precision, appealed to him, and they cut hard stuff. That was his speed, his game. Hard stuff. Meanwhile, he saw a good deal of Kitty Costello and, in consequence, half-formed visions of a future presented themselves.

Kitty's bearing toward him had changed subtly,

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agreeably, and when the old, restless, reckless craving for excitement stirred, it was those inchoate visions that quelled them.

It is nice to believe that virtue has its own immediate reward and that fortune invariably smiles upon the convert, but, alas! it isn't so. Fortune is fickle and she has an impartial way of distributing her favors and her frowns between the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Jim suffered the usual fate of him who tries to reform: just when he had convinced himself that the world was his friend and held out to him a helping hand, it turned and kicked him. It was a wicked, uncalled-for kick and it completely destroyed his budding faith in the brotherhood of man.

Mr. Lowman Duryea, on behalf of the Social Uplift League, appealed to the authorities to remove Midge Murray from Jim's demoralizing influence and both Donovan and his charge were summoned to appear before the Juvenile Court.

Midge, of course, had no idea what this meant, hence it gave him a certain feeling of importance. Jim, on the other hand, was frankly apprehensive. When he told the Car Barn gang about it, they were deeply indignant and volunteered in a body to come to the rescue. They offered to take the stand and solemnly swear that Jim was not a demoralizing influence, but that he was, on the contrary, a moral

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force of the first magnitude—a gentleman of the highest integrity and a monument of virtue; that his example was an inspiration to the right-minded youth of the East Side and that his private Bible readings had practically rid the whole neighborhood of crime.

“Nix! A boost from youse guys would gimme life,” he declared. “Why, if dis bunch swarmed into court, de judge would ring fer de resoives an’ de bailiffs would have screamin’ hysterics. A lotta women an’ children would be trampled, too.”

“We can swear you’re woikin’, Jimmy. You got your dinner pail to show dat, an’ a dinner pail’s a good influence.”

“How about us settin’ in de front row an’ lookin’ doity at de judge?” It was the resourceful Mr. Doyle speaking. “Talk about hysterics! We can t’row a chill into him so deep he’ll be scared to give you anyt’ing wise’n a handclasp. Or mebbe a good stiff Black Hand letter would help?”

“Sure! An’ w’ats de matter of us layin’ away dis psalm-shouter, Duryea? We can fit ’im to a hospital cot, easy; dem Park Avenue harp players has got thin skulls. Why, dere’s a t’ousan’ ways to beat dis, Jim!”

Their ex-leader shook his head in bleak despondency. “I give ye credit for meanin’ well, but ye gotta lay off, cold. Father Marron’s wit’ me an’ so’s

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Kitty Costello, an' if a boost from dem won't put me over, I'm sunk. Of course, dere's Midge, too. All de judge has gotta do is take a slant at de kid. He can *see* how well I've took care o' him. All de same, I trust a court about as far as I can t'row an anvil wit' me left hand. I'm scared—losin' me noive, I guess. Only one t'ing"—he looked up into the serious, sympathetic faces of his friends—"dere ain't nobody can split me away from dat kid. Nobody's gonna send him away to no Home where dey'll beat him wit' a strap an' feed him a lotta slop to put his stummick on de bum. Dem Homes is fulla crooked kids, an' Midge is kinda tough, anyhow. He's gotta have good bringin'-up. I'll shoot me way outa dat Children's Court, wit' him under me arm, before I'll stand for a t'ing like dat."

The time was when Donovan had prided himself upon his ability to beat any charge against him; but when he appeared at the Juvenile Court it was with deeper misgivings than he had ever experienced, not excepting his first visit to General Sessions.

The proceedings were more informal than he was accustomed to. The judge was a youngish man with a pleasant face and a kindly manner toward children, but the brisk, decisive way in which he dealt with adult witnesses convinced Jim that he was in for a bad quarter of an hour when his time came.

Mr. Duryea presented his, or rather his League's,

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case briefly. There was not much to it, and yet enough. Here was an orphan child whose brother, a man of evil living, had been shot to death in a brawl and who had fallen into the hands of the most notorious gangster of the whole East Side. The boy was utterly dependent, he was being reared amid low surroundings and criminal associates. Mr. Duryea had appealed to the parish priest, hoping that some Catholic welfare organization would handle the case, but nothing had been done. The man Donovan was here; the court could decide if he were a person of proper character to keep the child. In case there was any doubt, Mr. Duryea had provided other witnesses, former associates—fellow gangsters, in fact.

Jim started; he ran his eyes over the courtroom. Miller again, eh? And Monk Manelli. He wondered if they had framed this or if they were merely willing tools in the hands of this meddler. Revengeful he knew them to be, but he could credit neither with sufficient nerve to take the stand against him. That would involve laying up more trouble than they could possibly crave.

The court, it seemed, knew a good deal about Donovan, and agreed with Mr. Duryea's measure of him, nevertheless he examined Jim.

The latter made the best case he could for himself, and Father Dan and Kitty bore out his account

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of the care he had given Midge. All three of them stressed the fact that he had gone to work.

"Your honor," Mr. Duryea claimed the court's attention, "it appears to be the contention of the defendant and his two witnesses that the mere fact that he has recently gone to work completely whitewashes his character. They appear to believe that a loafer who takes a job is a hero. He admits that he is in daily—rather, nightly—contact with his gang, and there is no tougher crowd in the city than the Car Barn boys."

The judge nodded. "I know. But Father Marron and Miss Costello say the boy has improved surprisingly since Donovan took him. He's well, he's up in his studies, he goes to Sunday school and sings in the choir. He doesn't look abused. What do you say to that?"

"Nothing. Donovan's a healthy-looking specimen, himself. I can only call your honor's attention to the boy's home surroundings. The more thoroughly Donovan educates him, the more carefully he coaches him, the more dangerous will be the type of criminal he turns out. In all my experience with social-welfare work I have never encountered a case which so urgently demanded the law's instant intervention."

"Let me talk to the boy himself." A uniformed court officer led Midge up to the bench where the

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judge could speak with him. "Midge," the latter began, "do you know what place this is?" The boy nodded. He was badly frightened; his heart was pounding terribly and his voice had deserted him. "Do you know what this hearing is about? Come! Can't you speak out loud?" Again Midge tried and failed. He turned his eyes to Jimmy, and Donovan felt something swell in his throat. The kid was scared. They were torturing him. Damn such people, trying to terrify a child!

"How old are you, my boy?"

"Seven, goin' on eight," came the reedy response.

"Father Dan says you're a good singer, and a good boy, too. Be a good boy now and answer my questions truthfully. Promise?"

"S-sure."

"Do you know the difference between the truth and a lie?"

"Coit'ny."

"How do you like Donovan, the man you live with?"

"I like him fine. Him an' me is brudders."

"What makes you like him?"

"Why—I jus' tol' ya. He's me brudder."

"Do you obey him?"

"I'll say I do. He'd knock me fer a goal if I didn't."

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"So? Does he punish you? Come, answer me. Does he—beat you?"

"N-not much."

"What did he whip you for, the last time?"

"Takin' dope."

"*What?*" Midge's answer had created a sensation; even Mr. Duryea sat forward in his chair.

"Sure! A doity bum gimme some white 'stuff an'——"

"Who was he? A friend of Donovan's?"

Midge grinned and cast another glance at the petrified Jimmy. "Naw! He ain't no friend. Hully Gee! Ya should a heard 'em! Jim pulled a gun on 'im—dat long! An' he'd a croaked 'im right dere on'y fer goin' to de 'lectric chair. But he'll get 'im yet; he said he would, so dat's in an' over. Nobody ever gets away wit' nuttin' like dat. He's a ten-minute egg, Jim is."

"Um-m! Jim is a pretty bad man, isn't he?" Midge began to get the drift of things now; they were pumping him, trying to put something over on Jim, so he began energetically to boost for his pal. "I see." The judge nodded, after a while. "He's your hero and you're going to be just like him when you grow up. Is that it?"

That was it, precisely. Midge became loquacious. He gave his inquisitor to understand that Jim was a tough customer and brooked no interference with his

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personal affairs, not even from meddlers like—like Duryea. He made bold to turn up his nose at the agent of the Social Uplift League. Why, even the cops were afraid of Jim and he had a gang back of him that would as soon kill you as not—maybe sooner. Not that Jim needed any help; he could look out for himself, all right, Jim could, and he packed a gun in every pocket. He could lick any two policemen in New York and often did it, and handcuffs fell off his hands of their own weight, and it didn't bother him a bit to go to jail because he could walk right out the minute he wanted to, and—Midge paused, out of breath. All he had to say was that Jimmy Donovan was one right guy and he was proud to be his pal. It wouldn't pay anybody to try and send *him* up the river.

"You have the wrong idea, my boy," the court told him finally; then as succinctly as possible he explained the real significance of these proceedings. When it finally dawned upon Midge that it was he and not Jim who was in danger of being sent away, when he realized that this smiling, hypocritical stranger in the black kimono intended to separate him from his beloved brother, he flew into a rage. He had been deceived, betrayed in the dirtiest possible manner, so he cursed the judge.

Donovan clutched the railing in front of him and

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moaned faintly as oath after oath tumbled from Midge's lips.

"Take that boy away!" the court directed.

This move savored of kidnapping. Midge imagined he was being hustled straight to Sing Sing, so he yelled for Jimmy and fought the officer. He dodged, he squirmed, he struck and he bit at his captor; he was borne, kicking, scratching, squalling, to his seat, where he scrambled swiftly into Donovan's arms and clung there with the strength of a baby chimpanzee.

"Don't let 'em!" he sobbed. "Oh, Jimmy, don't let 'em! Don't let 'em!"

The court was saying something about a shocking example of something or other . . . need of restraint . . . firm hand of authority. . . . Above Midge's clamor, Jim heard the words "Roosevelt Home."

God! His kid was being sent away, committed as casually, as coldly, as if he were a thief or a pickpocket, instead of a clean-living, heart-hungry little boy who had never done a wrong. And this was justice!

Father Marron was asking that the boy be paroled in care of the Catholic Big Brothers and promising to secure for him a guardian approved by the organization, but the judge's feelings had been ruf-

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fled and he still suffered from shock at Midge's depravity.

"I appreciate your personal interest, Father, but this boy is—vicious. He needs a firm, corrective influence."

Jimmy rose, with the trembling boy in his arms, and addressed the court.

"Your Honor, please sir! It—it ain't right. He never coised like dat in his hull life—he was just scared. Why, I can feel his heart jumpin' out of his breast, dis minute. He's a good little boy an' he wouldn't harm a fly. I been a tough boid, but he give ye de wrong dope on me. Honest he did. I got a steady job an' I'll cut out all de old stuff—you know—if you'll let me keep 'im. Y'see I—I cook his grub for 'im, his stummick is dat weak, an'—dey couldn't do dat. Can't ye lemme keep 'im?"

No one could have doubted the speaker's poignant distress, for his voice was husky and uncertain, his face was white. Not unkindly the judge told him:

"I appreciate your affection for the boy, Donovan, and I must confess I'm somewhat surprised at it, coming from you. If you were an ordinary fellow, I'd be inclined to listen to you, but—you're a notorious character. I can't put much faith in your professed reform, especially inasmuch as you haven't even tried to cut loose from your old associates, so I'll have to commit the boy. He'll get better atten-

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tion than you can give him, and if you really care for him you should be glad that he's going to have a chance to amount to something."

A short while later, in one of the anterooms, they took Midge away from Jimmy—tore him from the gangster's arms—and the sight of that parting nearly broke Kitty Costello's tender heart.

With the boy's last anguished cry in his ears, with his last salt kiss upon his lips, Jimmy Donovan turned furiously upon Father Dan, crying: "Dere ye got it—de hull dam' system! Dat's justice!" He brushed the tears from his eyes and went on, harshly: "To hell wit' it, an' to hell wit' everyt'ing! I'm hard-boiled, I am. Me an' me gang is rowdies. Oh, sure! We're doity rats an' we ain't fit to have brothers, but d'ye t'ink any gangster in New York would do a t'ing like dis? Tear de heart out of a little kid? Rip de guts out of a guy dat's tryin' his best——? But de 'good' people do it. Say, if it wasn't fer dem, dere wouldn't be no toughs. '*Good*'! I hope dey rot! I hope dey boin a million years in hell!"

"You had a bad break," Father Dan agreed, quietly, "and I believe the boy would have been better off in your hands than——"

"It allus breaks bad fer me, but—it soives me right, tryin' to be what I ain't. Me splittin away from de gang, an' woikin' me head off, an' hearin' de

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kid's prayers—! I ain't 'good' enough to hear a kid's prayers or cook his grub or keep 'im clean. I'm too vicious! All right. I've had me convincer: I'm t'rough!"

"You mean you're going back?"

"*Am* I? Watch me."

Kitty Costello closed her eyes in sudden pain. She could understand the man's revolt, his desperation, and she could sympathize. But of late, when she was all alone, she had painted a picture, built a castle, and now it was being torn in two, tumbled down. She heard Jim running on, still in that tone of fury:

"I been a bad boy, all right, but I been playin' at it, just to amuse meself an' get even wit' de cops. I got a nut on me shoulders, I have; I got de makin's in me, an' I'll show 'em how bad a guy can be when he *woiks* at it. Take de heart out of a man's breast, eh? Thumb his eyes out when he's down? I'll do a little o' dat stuff, meself, fer dis town's on its back to me, an' its hands is tied. Watch me gouge an' hear de 'good' guys holler. I can beat all de courts an' all de coppers in it, standin' on me head. I'll make 'em oin deir pay."

"You don't mean that, Jim," the priest declared.

"No, I don't! I talk like I'm kiddin', don't I?"

"The devil works fast when he knows his time is short," Father Marron quoted.

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"Same here."

"I told you it took a tough guy to run straight. This is where the yellow streak shows."

"Yeller! Yeller!" Donovan laughed hoarsely. "I fell fer dat chatter once an'—look at me!"

"You want Midge back, don't you?"

"*Want* 'im? O my God!" The speaker abruptly turned his back.

"You can have him. There's no trouble about that."

The gangster's working features came into view again. "Whaddye mean?"

"Earn him! He hasn't been sent away to do a stretch; he isn't even a delinquent—merely a dependent. *You* know you're good enough to take care of him. Make *us* know it. Show the court."

"Me? Show *him*? If I showed 'im Brooklyn Bridge he wouldn't believe it."

"You're Midge's brother in love, his brother in spirit; you can become his—his Big Brother if you have the guts."

Jim clutched at the familiar words. "Honest? Would dey gimme a chance? Nobody would take 'im away?"

"I think I can promise it. You'd die for that boy, I do believe. Why is it so much harder for you to live for him?"

Donovan choked now; the tears were very close.

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He sank upon a bench and bowed his head in his hands. "I dunno's I can do it?" he mumbled.

Kitty spoke for the first time, and it was with the soothing faith of a mother. "*I know you can do it.*" She sat down beside Jim and laid her arm across his bent shoulders. Father Dan walked away. "Midge is a dear and they'll take good care of him."

"I'm scared dey 'll lick 'im."

"Nonsense! He'll own the place in a month and they'll love him."

"I don't want nobody to love 'im or him to love nobody but me," came the muffled words. "He'll forget me."

"Not Midge. You can see him every visitor's day. You've got something to live for now, Jim."

It was some time before Donovan raised his head; then he looked squarely into Kitty's eyes. It was the first time he had ever met her gaze for more than an instant. There was a faint smile upon his lips when he said:

"T'ank ye for bein' so nice to a poor bum. It didn't break so bad for me to-day, after all. I had an hour o' hell but I—I had a few minutes o' heaven, too, an' dat's pretty good for de likes o' me. I'm goin' t'rough, all right."

"I knew you would," said Kitty.

Good intentions, like bright metals, soon tarnish. Exaltation of the soul is comforting while it lasts, but

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mortal desire is in constant conflict with spiritual determination and only the single-track mind of a fanatic can long sustain itself upon an idea, an inspiration.

Jimmy Donovan came away from court afire with a great purpose, but the flame flickered and all but went out when he entered his empty room, for everywhere he looked he saw something that reminded him of Midge; in every corner the boy's wistful face appeared. His little nightgown, a pair of shoes run over at the heels and stubbed out at the toes, his slate and pencil and dog-eared lesson books all gave the man a painful thrust and emphasized his loneliness. Jim realized now for the first time how empty his life had been before the boy came, and how full thereafter. The thought of living here alone once more, without something to love and to protect, filled him with dismay. That splendid conception of his began to lose form and vividness; he doubted his ability to carry on.

Yes, and Midge was having a blacker hour than he, for the boy was frightened. He was calling for his big brother. Jim could not bear to let his mind run far along this line, so he locked the place and fled into the streets. Evening came and from force of habit he turned toward the nearest restaurant, but checked himself. Midge wouldn't be eating any supper, so—they'd fast together. They'd be putting

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him to bed before long, in some cell full of rats and roaches—Jim's idea of a Juvenile Home were vague—and they probably had his hair cropped by now and a suit of stripes on him. If he rebelled (and Midge had a temper) they'd put him in a dungeon on bread and water. Suppose he got sick? What if he grieved himself to death? Jim fetched himself up with an oath. He would have to cut out these thoughts for he was getting as jumpy as Cokey Joe.

That night he split definitely and completely with the gang, explaining that he had been put on probation and that Midge was doing a stretch on his account. The length of that stretch would depend upon how closely he watched his step and he proposed to take no chances. The boys could call him yellow if they wanted to. He probably was yellow, but he was in no mood to have that epithet applied to him by others.

When the first visitor's day came around, Donovan quit at noon and went out to the Roosevelt Home. It was just beyond the city line and the country round about was clean and green and beautiful in the fresh verdure of spring, but he had no eyes for it. He was agreeably surprised at the appearance of the Home, for it was not at all what he had pictured; it was nothing like a Bridewell. There were no frowning walls, no clanging gates of steel. It was a sort of farm with scattered build-

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ings set amid high trees and closely clipped lawns; there were flower and vegetable gardens and sunny playgrounds. A crowd of older boys were playing baseball and, judged by the racket they made, they were having a good time. Queer! Nor were there any armed guards in sight, and except for a chain-link fence of moderate height that appeared to surround the grounds, there was nothing to prevent escape. Windows were not barred, gates stood open, vehicles and pedestrians came and went. It would be a cinch to spring Midge from this place.

Jim's first sight of his ward was a shock, nevertheless, for the boy was clad in the same denim suit that he had seen on the other boys and that enraged the caller. Outside of that, however, he was unchanged and his greeting of Jim was such as to warm the ex-gangster's heart. When the latter had produced, one by one, the presents that bulged his pockets, they put in the early afternoon wandering about the farm, hand in hand, and talking like magpies to make up for lost time. Midge showed off his brother to the other boys, and then showed off the gardens to his brother. It was all strange and foreign to both of them and the boy explained repeatedly that things good to eat came right up out of the ground, such things as mickeys and onions and tomatoes—stuff he had supposed came in crates. All you had to do was stick them in little holes and cover

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them up with dirt and in a few days you had "hunnerds." It was different with butter and eggs. You didn't plant eggs. Practically everything on the place was good to eat, and those trees—Midge pointed up to the oaks and the maples—gave apples and oranges and peanuts and things, just like in a book. There were many interesting features about this Home but, even so, he confessed that he was desperately homesick and still not a little bit frightened.

"Gee! I was awful scared de foist night," he told Jim. "I 'most died, I did. Ya couldn't hear a t'ing, Jim, an'—an' eyes was lookin' at ya. Somma de boys said dey was bears an' lions all over de woods an' I cried till mornin'. I tried to get sick so dey'd send me back home. I didn't eat nuttin', an' I prayed fer measles an' yellah fever, but nuttin' happened. Bime by I got so hungry I couldn't stand it. It ain't so woise now."

"Atta boy! You stick, kid. I'm comin' to get ye some day. Me an' Father Dan has got it all fixed."

Midge clung to his hand. "Can't ya take me home now? Gee! If I could on'y hear de Elevated an' de whistles an' de ottomobiles. It's so still ya can hear it. Ya gotta put yer head unner de covers at night to keep it out."

"It's a big help to me, you stayin' here on free

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board like you are. I'm soakin' me coin away an' gettin' ahead fast. You gotta do your bit."

Midge reconciled himself in a way to this state of affairs, but he cried bitterly again when the hour came for Jim to leave.

The second month of separation was even harder to bear than the first, for that brief afternoon at the Home had served merely to whet Donovan's appetite, and by now the novelty of hard work was wearing off. The path of self-denial stretched itself before him, distressingly straight and narrow and interminably long. Times came when he rebelled furiously against the deadly monotony of his daily grind, when life became bleak and a hopeless misery enveloped him. He was denied even the solace of meeting and mixing with his old pals and he could make no new ones.

Things were not going well with the Car Barn crowd, either, by the way, for, lacking the cohesive force of Jim's personality, first the other gangs had become independent and gradually activities had begun to clash. This resulted in hard feelings. Then, too, friction developed between the Car Barn boys themselves, and they split up. With Donovan out of the way, the police rode them close and several were sent up, which gave rise to charges of disloyalty and to talk about "stools." Small groups of four or five had begun to run together and law-

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lessness of a serious nature was common in the neighborhood. From various quarters of the city came reports of hold-ups and pay-roll robberies.

Jim was kept in fairly close touch with these developments, for the underworld is a peculiarly sensitive realm, vibrating to faint currents and cross currents of rumor and of gossip, and fellows like Spike Doyle, whose friendship had been proven, came to him now and then with all the latest news.

Jim visited Roosevelt Home regularly, and every month he likewise visited Father Dan. Invariably he asked the same question—how long? There was something pathetic about his singleness of purpose and his utter faith in the priest. It grieved that good man to be unable to offer him more definite encouragement. Jim played the game, however; the path to which he had set his feet led him to church and he attended regularly, avoiding nothing that could by any means shorten his period of probation, for always he was uncomfortably aware of unseen eyes upon him—the eyes of the Law. The Law came to mean something very big, very stern, very watchful. His reformation became a topic of conversation on East Ninetieth Street and people acknowledged that he was no longer so interesting as he had been—an opinion to which he heartily subscribed; then they forgot all about him.

One person there was whose interest did not lag,

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and that was Kitty Costello; without it he might have faltered, strayed, but her approval was like wine and her sympathy gave him strength. She was an angel and, oh, so pretty! One day, in all diffidence, he invited her to go down to Coney Island with him. He anticipated a refusal and he would not have resented it. He was nearly stricken speechless, therefore, when she accepted—gladly. Here was progress. Kitty went out only with decent fellows; to be seen with her gave him a feeling of respectability that was almost oppressive.

They had a wonderful Sunday together, and coming back he told her how, on the occasion of Cokey Joe Miller's last visit, he had promised to take Midge to this land of wonders and how bitter had been his disappointment at his inability to do so.

"I saw that fellow again yesterday," Kitty said, with a little shudder of repugnance. "It's queer how he affects me—like a snake."

"Where'd you see him? He didn't speak to you, did he?" Jimmy's tone, the quick red glow that lighted his eyes, gave the girl a pleasant thrill. Sometimes the woman who needs protection least craves it the most.

"No. I passed him as I came out of the bank. Manelli was with him, but they didn't see me at all."

"Say, don't you go bankin' your coin all in one place. Banks is regular dead-falls."

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"A lot I have to put in the bank. I had the pay roll."

Donovan's bantering smile gave way to a frown. "Whaddye mean, pay roll?"

"Why, for the plant! I draw it every Saturday, just before the bank closes. That gives me time to make out the envelopes. Where do you think your money comes from?"

"Dere's a lotta hold-ups lately."

"I know, but Mr. McConnigle thinks nobody would suspect a girl. Anyhow, who'd hold *me* up?"

"I dunno. Listen. If ever ye do get it, don't try an' be a hero. Take me tip an' don't pull a Poil White. Dem struggles is great in de movies, but when a guy gets so hard up he goes for a pay roll in daylight, he's too noivous to t'ink about manners. You'd look cute, wouldn't you, wit' a lump on yer head?"

"Ouch!" exclaimed Kitty.

"I'd keep yer room fulla flowers, but flowers costs money an' money's expensive. Dat's somet'ing I've loined lately. If McConnigle can't go wit' ye, ask him to send me."

"Do you honestly think there's any danger?"

"Not wit' a guy like me along. It wouldn't hardly be interestin'."

Kitty promised to speak to the boss, but when a week or two had passed and Jim was not called upon

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he assumed that the firm had delegated somebody else to act as her escort. They could scarcely be expected to trust an ex-gangster that far.

Once only during the long summer did Donovan put over something crooked and Midge was the cause of that. A month to the boy was an eternity, and finally he declared his intention of running away unless Jim came oftener to see him, so the man yielded to his own hungry desires and consented to return the next Saturday afternoon.

They had found a secluded spot on the grounds where nobody ever came, and there, at the appointed time, they met. For two long hours they visited, through the fence, and Jim left barely in time to get back to the plant for the pay-off. Several times they repeated this performance, until Donovan awoke to the perils of the practice. He was sufficiently experienced to realize that discovery was inevitable, and sober thought convinced him that he was not only doing the boy a grave injustice, but also that he was jeopardizing the outcome of his own experiment. He had suffered too much to endure the prospect of postponing his reward, and so he declared the thing must end, at once, that very day.

Midge refused point blank to accept this dictum. He had never done anything to warrant his imprisonment; he hated the place, anyhow, and everybody in

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it. He'd run away. The bigger boys were always talking about escape and some of them tried it. He could make a getaway any time he felt like it, and if Jim didn't love him enough to come and see him, he knew what he'd do. He'd go out West and kill real Indians or become a conductor. The West was full of opportunities for men of his type. He knew how to make butter now; he could get to be a cowboy and send for Jim.

The latter argued gently with him. "I'd give me right eye to see ye every day," he confessed, "but we gotta be regular guys. You can't get nowhere by cheatin', Midge. You gotta loin how to take de woist of it wit'out squealin'. Dat's what makes a good gangster. Dere's laws everywhere, kid, an' men has gotta live up to 'em. Dem rules you got in dere is boy laws. Anybody can bust a law, but it—it takes a tough guy to run straight."

"I don't wanna run straight," Midge declared, angrily. "I wanna be like you."

Donovan flushed; his heart sank. Here was a quick crop; here was fertile soil indeed. No wonder Midge thought all you had to do was put seed in a hole and in a day or so get "hunnerds." He tried to explain that he was not a tough citizen, that he had been a bad boy, like Midge, but that now his past filled him with unspeakable horror. He had reformed and the new life was something to talk about; it was

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splendid; it was fun. It was dead easy to be crooked, but—he repeated Father Dan's text that it takes a tough guy to go straight. That was a telling line and he was glad he remembered it.

All boys are bandits and Midge Murray was sorely disappointed in his hero. Jim was finally forced to issue an ultimatum—not only was this their last illegal visit, but also he would completely cut Midge off his calling list unless he promised to can this talk about running away. He would not come back at all. With these words he rose to go.

Midge thrust his little hands through the wire mesh and clung to him. He wept. A month was too long; he couldn't stand it; but he'd promise to be good.

Jim kissed him through the fence, and his last picture was of the boy still weeping, his hands out-thrust like a prisoner with his wrists in the stocks.

Evidently there had been some delay in paying off the men to-day, for the window was closed when Jim arrived and the line extended out into the yard. As he hurried through to take his place at the end, a stranger stepped out of the cashier's office and said:

"McConnigle wants to see you, Donovan."

"See me? What for?" Jim knew instantly that the man was a detective.

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There was no answer. Jim passed down the hall and into the manager's office, but as he stepped through the door his companion announced, triumphantly: "Here he is. Just come in all out of breath."

McConnigle rose from his desk with an exclamation; then Jim saw that there was another plain-clothes officer with him. They had been questioning Kitty Costello, for she stood at bay, very white and shaken. She had been crying, and now she dabbed at her eyes with a tiny wad of a handkerchief and blew her nose.

Trouble again! Instantly Donovan was on guard.

"What do you know about this?" McConnigle barked at him.

"About what?"

"This hold-up."

"What hold-up?"

The officer who had entered with Jim broke in shortly: "Lemme do the talkin'. You better come clean, Donovan. We've got enough on you to hold you, but what we want is that money and we want it quick."

"Was you stuck up?" Jim shot the question at Kitty and she nodded. "Who done it? Anybody we know?"

"I don't think so. There were two strangers who walked along and crowded me over. Oh, it all hap-

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pened so quickly and so unexpectedly. You warned me about it and told me not to fight them, but I'm sorry I didn't, for these officers seem to think—they act as if——” Kitty broke down and sobbed wretchedly.

Donovan's face had reddened. With a sneer he exclaimed: “Sure! I know how dey act. Just because you didn't give battle an' get bumped off dey t'ink you're in on it. Coitenly!” To McConnigle he blazed: “An' because I give her a little good advice, I framed it. Dat's great! You got a poifect case—I *don't t'ink!* You oughta get rapped on de roof wit' a lead pipe, sendin' a goil all alone t'rough de streets wit' a suitcase o' kale an' de town boilin' wit' stick-ups. I hope ye lost a million. Why didn't ye spread it out on a tray?”

“Too bad McConnigle didn't send *you* with her. You asked him, didn't you?” It was the first detective speaking.

“I didn't ask nuttin', stupid.”

“How comes you didn't hear about this stick-up? Been at work all afternoon?”

Again Donovan's lips curled scornfully. “Now, Sherlock! You know as well as I do I was off at noon. Where'd ye go, you says next. Well, I went out to see me kid. Roosevelt Home.”

The officer in his turn was getting red. “Don't

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get too fresh, young fellow. Where were you last Saturday when this girl went to the bank?"

"Same place."

"And the Saturday before that?"

"Roosevelt Home."

"Hunh! You always was good on alibis, but that's easy checked up. We'll call the Home when we get to it."

Hastily Jim said: "Dat won't get you nuttin'. Visitors ain't allowed only once a month."

"Oh! They let *you* in any time?"

Plainly there was danger here of getting Midge into trouble, so Jim ignored the elaborate irony of the last inquiry and with rigid face and steady stare explained: "I'm stuck on dat kid. It goes hard seein' him so seldom, so I hang around de outside an' look in. Foolish, ain't it?"

"You said it—foolish! Couldn't you frame a better one than that?"

The other plain-clothes man spoke up now. "Maybe he *was* out there. What kind of a car did you use?"

"Me own private car, same as allus."

"What's the number?"

"Now you got me, officer. Us millionaires has got so many an' de numbers runs so high; but ye can find it easy. On de front it says, 'Bronx Express.'"

"No use grilling him," McConnigle asserted, im-

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patiently. "I want that money and we're wasting time." The desk phone at his elbow rang and he snatched it up. He was disappointed in the call, however, for evidently it came from some downtown news service. "Yes. Yes! Thirty-five hundred and something. . . . About two thirty or quarter of three. . . . They snatched it from my bookkeeper and ran. . . . No, they didn't hurt her. One of them got away in an automobile, but the other couldn't make it; he ran. The officer on the corner chased him, but— . . . Yes, they picked the car up on the West Side later, or one that looked like it. They ran that, too, as far as Van Cortlandt Park, then they lost it. Headed east, towards the Bronx. . . . Oh, sure, we have some clues! We're working on them now. . . . Not at all. Good-by."

During this conversation the detectives had been conferring in low tones and Donovan had done some thinking. To his employer, he said:

"You don't really t'ink Miss Costello was in on dis play, do ye?"

"I—I hate to think so, but these men——"

"We're here to do the thinking," Jim's captor broke in. "She's been pallin' around with you and she got you in here. You've been off every pay-day when she went for the money, and you made a play to be appointed her guard. It didn't get over, but when the stick-up happens she lets go of that satchel

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without a squawk and comes in without even her hair mussed. All right. Just now we're waitin' for news of a green Cadillac touring car with two bran'-new spares and a Jersey license. The plate is phony, of course, but the car was bound up toward the Bronx and in you breeze from the Bronx not two hours later. Been hangin' over the fence at an orphan asylum! To get a peek at your kid! Anybody see you there? No. You just love kids and flowers. You was makin' a daisy chain, maybe. Lousy, Jim! Lousy! We've got you. What we want next is that thirty-five hundred. We'll sweat the rest out of this girl. A little of the rough stuff—you know!—and they usually come through."

"Wait!" Donovan cried, sharply. "You could hang a guy like me on what you got, but her—You want dat coin? All right! Gimme a chance to locate it. I got friends an' me head ain't as fat as some I know. Any guys dat 'll waste time sweatin' her wouldn't know a pay roll if dey saw it. But ye gotta move fast, before it's split up. Toin me loose——"

"Sure we'll turn you loose," heartily assented the former speaker, "just like—this!" With the words, he snapped a pair of handcuffs upon Donovan's wrists. "You'd hurry right out and get that kale, now, wouldn't you? And you'd hurry right back with it. Of course you would! Better ring for the

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wagon, Joe. I'll take this bozo into the next room and have a little talk with him while you work on the girl. How do them irons feel, Donovan?"

"I couldn't 'a' stood it much longer wit'out 'em." Jim passed through the door that was held open for him.

"Don't have me arrested," Kitty implored her employer. "Jim's honest and—so am I."

"It's out of my hands," McConnigle told her, in genuine distress. "These policemen are sure Donovan used you, at least, and—well, it serves me right for taking in a—a gangster like him. I don't believe in reform; never have."

The officer called Joe began brusquely and in a tone that carried to Donovan's ears: "Now then, miss, do you realize what it means to be booked on a charge like this? You know how the newspapers handle this kind of a story: 'Gangster's girl accused of complicity in daring daylight robbery.' A lot of stuff like that. You're a poor girl and you've got a mother on your hands. It'll be a long time before you get another job even if you beat this case." Kitty moaned faintly and bowed her head. "Come, now! Mr. McConnigle can't afford to lose that money. If you could remember seeing Donovan in that car he might consent to drop the charge against you. What d'you say?"

For some time the girl endured this torture in

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silence. Her questioner finally gave up and called in to the next room, "The wagon's here; bring him in." When there came no response, he rose, opened the door, and—almost stumbled over the body of his team mate.

The latter lay motionless upon the carpet. He was breathing faintly, his head was bleeding freely from a nasty scalp wound, and the handcuffs that Donovan had worn lay beside him, advertising the source of the contusion that had laid him low. A window stood open.

A five-handed penny-ante game in Spike Doyle's room was interrupted when Jimmy Donovan entered unannounced. Briefly but quietly he explained how and why he had come.

The pugilist was the first to speak. "Gee, dat's tough, after all your woik!"

"Sure. It's de blow off. But wouldn't ye t'ink dem fly cops would of loined somet'ing by dis time? De idea o' lockin' me up alone wit' one dick, an' nuttin' on me but a pair o' tin cuffs! What good is a reppitation, anyhow? Dey got a great set-up, though. I'm de master mind dat framed de skull-duggery an' Kitty is Nugget Nell, de bandit's bride. She's in on it. Can ye beat dat fer solid ivory? Dey was givin' her de thoid when I left—dat's what made me see red." There were general expressions

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of indignation at this, and Jim went on: "Dey'll book her, sure, an' McConnigle ain't got de noive to call 'em off. Ye know what dat means. It'll kill her old woman."

"Looks like dey got it on you pretty strong, Jim; an' your getaway don't help it none," said one of the boys.

"Oh, sure! I'm cooked. I gotta woik 'fast. Whaddye know about dis hold-up?"

"We knew somepin was comin' off," Doyle confessed, "but we never s'posed——"

"Miller an' Manelli had a piece of it; dey been spottin' for two or t'ree weeks. She seen 'em. Anybody know where dey hang out?"

"Over in Hell's Kitchen. Dey come up fer air when you took de veil an' dey been specializin' on strong-arm stuff—dem an' de two Aronsons."

"I should 'a' bumped 'em off when I had de chance; anyhow, Miller. He's me king o' spades." Jim told of Cokey Joe's visit to Midge, and the boys were loud in their wrath. "Dat's de kind of a roach he is. An' he played in wit' dat holy-roller dat sent de kid away. Killin' wouldn't do him a bit o' harm."

"How you goin' at dis t'ing, now?" Doyle inquired, sharply.

"I dunno yet. Here's how I got it pitched, takin' it for granted dey done it: de Aronsons

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grabbed dat keester—Kitty not knowin' 'em, see? Manelli's a chauffeur, so he run de car, an' dat left Joe to look out. One o' de Aronsons made it to de car an' Manelli dusted, leavin' de other one flat. Dem boys musta had a scare, for dey never got clear dis side o' Van Cortlandt. Dey'll drift in, one at a time, after dark, for de split. Aronson or Manelli will have de coin on 'em. Dey wouldn't give it to Miller."

"Mebbe it wasn't dem, at all."

"Sure. Dem's me chances. But what was Monk an' Joe doin' around de bank? I s'pose dere's a four-eleven alarm out for me by dis time, but I'm in wit' dat Kitchen crowd an' I'll get de low-down—if I ain't picked up."

"We better get movin'," said Doyle as he rose.

But Jimmy checked him. "Lay off, Spike. Wanna start another gang war an' get a lotta guys killed?"

"You can't do nuttin' alone."

"Not much, mebbe, but I'm at de end o' me string, anyhow. I've lost me kid an' me—an' everyt'ing else. If McConnigle gets his coin back, mebbe he won't house Kitty, an' I'm t'inkin' o' her. After supper ye can look up Father Dan an' give him de inside. I'd like him to know I was straight. Him an' Kitty. Don't squeal on Manelli an' Miller an' de Aronsons; just tell him a guy like me don't mind

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takin' a chance for somebody dat's woith it. So long!"

There was some surprise among the Hell's Kitchen boys when Jimmy Donovan appeared with the announcement that the police were after him.

"What's gone wrong wit' de big reform?" somebody inquired.

Donovan answered with a grin: "A guy's gotta reform when he's crowded. Dey grabbed me kid an' put me on probation. What else could I do? I been walkin' pretty, an' goin' to choich, an' singin' tenor at de top o' me voice, but"—he shook his head angrily—"dere's a Jew coise on me. I had a deal all ribbed for t'irty-five hundred—a poifect set-up it was—an' somebody beats me to it."

"Whaddya mean?"

"Pay roll. I been woikin' de skoit dat carries it; spendin' me coin on her, too, an' takin' her to Coney, an'—Lookit!" He extended his hands for observation. "Dere's me badge o' shame. Money oined by dem callouses—hard money! I spend it like water on dat Jane an' get her all jumpy wit' hold-up stories. Honest, de boss is about to deppetize me for a special guard, when—zowie! In crashes a bunch o' yeggs, strong-arms me gal, an' runs out wit' de coin. *My* coin! If dat ain't a break! Of course she spills de hull heart-renderin' story an' de cops slap de irons on me. Six months' hard woik,

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an' all I've done is frame meself right into a pinch! Not a chance to beat it, either. I slips dem mittens an' bends 'em over one o' de Hawkshaws. He's sleepin' yet. Looks like I'd have to run over to White Sulphur Springs or some stylish resort for me healt' if he don't wake up."

"Gee! dat's a hit!" one of the listeners announced, with a chuckle. "I gotta slip dat to Big Aronson."

"Yeah? Ain't he had a good laugh lately?" Jim appeared to be pretty sore. After a moment he said, casually, "Dey tell me Cokey Joe's joined out wit' youse guys."

"Sure! Him an' Monk Manelli."

"A coupla bums, de bot' of 'em! Me an' dem had a run-in. Say, has de Aronson boys got any kale?"

"Now an' again. Why?"

"Because I gotta make a getaway touch, an' a big one. De hull East Side is boilin' an' de cops is layin' for me. Mebbe youse guys can pass de hat? All I need is a coupla hundred——"

"Stop dat noise, Jim! Little Aronson's aroun', but de big Jew's on de dodge. He can stake ye if he wants to."

"Dat 'll be fine. I done him many a good toin. How about a game o' Kelly?"

This suggestion was acted upon and during the next hour or so Donovan knocked the pool balls

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about, gossiping idly, but keeping his ears open. He knew as much now as was necessary, but he learned additional facts that made him even more certain of his ground. Darkness was slow in coming and meanwhile he wondered if Kitty had been taken to the station house. If so, delay would mean little to her, but as for himself, every hour put him in greater jeopardy inasmuch as the police on this side of town had doubtless been apprised of his escape and would soon be taking active steps to apprehend him. Dusk had settled when finally he slipped out into the street and made his way cautiously from doorway to doorway. Knowing pretty well where the officers on the avenue were apt to be found, he went down toward the river, and from there made his way to the Aronsons' place of residence through the negro section. Arrived safely, he took his place in the hallway of the building where they roomed, and waited as patiently as might be.

Big Aronson was the first to arrive. He appeared suddenly, as if materialized out of the shadows, and he was alone. When Jim spoke to him he started and reached nervously for his gun, but Donovan reassured him with a word and explained his mission. He was on the run; the police had blocked him off from his own gang; he needed money at once.

Aronson was relieved and expressed his willingness to help, but he, too, had put in a bad afternoon.

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"I know," Jim nodded. "Dat McConnigle job. Dey grabbed me for it. Dat's why I gotta duck."

"Nottin' like it!" Aronson roughly declared.

"Hush yer noise, Abe! I s'pose I'm gonna do a stretch for you an' your brother, just because I ain't got de price of a ducket? Do some t'inkin' for yourself! An' you wit' de coin on ye, dis minute."

The big fellow changed his tone. "I ain't got it, honest I ain't. They run us ragged, Jim. I jumped the car an' shot into a pitcher house. Been there in the dark all afternoon. Manelli's got the stuff."

"Manelli?"

"Sure! Him an' Miller. It was their job, anyhow."

"Fine chance I got wit' dem boids. Dere's a coupla bums I *would* squeal on. Dey squealed on me."

Aronson was indeed thinking for himself, and he said, earnestly: "Listen, Jim. Monk's goin' to leave the car in a garage he knows about. Him an' Joe 'll be in bime by an'——"

"Dey comin' here?"

"They better come! Lay out fer an hour or two an' then come back. I'll slip you a piece. Honest, I will."

"Looks like it's me only out," muttered Donovan. Reluctantly he moved toward the street.

He did not go far, however. Quickly he slipped

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into another hiding place and waited, his eyes roving actively up and down the thoroughfare. Outwardly, he was at ease, but within him a fever was burning. Make a bum of Kitty Costello, would they? As if this pair had not done enough to her already, yes, and to him. He smiled sardonically at the ease with which he had carried through his enterprise up to this point—as if these boys were any match for him! The adventure was becoming interesting now, and it began to look as if he might manage to pull it off. Its outcome would have given him no great concern if only he had dared to come armed as in olden days, but that, of course, was impossible, for only crooks evade the Sullivan law and he had laid off his automatic along with his other bad habits. To-day, of all days, he could not afford to carry a weapon or permit one to be planted on his person. After all, however, the risk was such that a little more, or less, made no difference.

He saw a patrolman saunter past the brightly lighted shop windows on the corner, stop and stare in. The fellow looked like Burke, and he remembered that Burke and Collins had been transferred some time back. One policeman was as good as another to-night, but it cheered him up to realize that he had acquaintances near by.

In and out of a big public garage on West End Avenue automobiles were coming and going, and

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every few minutes one of them rushed up the side street past him. Groups of children were playing noisily on the sidewalks and darting back and forth across the asphalt in reckless disregard of life and limb; on some steps under a near-by street light, several slovenly women were seated, calmly talking, in utter oblivion to the danger to their young ones. In the densely crowded, poorer sections of New York daily familiarity with traffic perils breeds a merciful indifference on the part of parents. A man in his shirt sleeves was teaching a very dirty baby to walk; inmates of the flats beneath which Jim waited brushed past him occasionally, but it was a sultry autumn evening and many of the doorways were blocked with loiterers, so his motionless figure excited no comment.

He waited for a long time.

A taxicab rounded the corner below, coming from uptown; it slowed down and drew in toward the curb. As it rolled past him Donovan caught a glimpse of its two occupants and sauntered forth.

Cokey Joe Miller was paying the driver, and Monk Manelli, with a package wrapped in a newspaper, was stepping out just as Jim approached. Jim had expected to see just such a bundle, all done up ready to be dropped in case of necessity. The whole thing, in fact, was happening just about as he had imagined it would, and in the peculiar frame of

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mind that accompanies repressed excitement it all seemed familiar—as if it had happened before or as if it were the final acting of a carefully rehearsed performance.

What occurred next was swift and unexpected. Manelli felt his package snatched from beneath his arm, felt himself flung backward so forcibly that his heels collided with the running board of the automobile and he fell half into the open door.

“Don’t move!” At the sharp command, Miller started and flung the silver in his palm broadcast, then he stood petrified, watching the man he feared and hated more than any man in the world back slowly away from him.

Manelli scrambled to his feet, but he, too, stood frozen.

The maneuver had been effected in less time than it takes to tell it. No doubt it would have been carried through as planned except for the fact that others had been awaiting the arrival of that package with anxiety equal to Donovan’s. The Aronson boys had been lurking belowstairs, and Jim heard them coming, glimpsed them over his shoulder. He turned and spoke to them in a low tone.

Profiting by this opportunity, Miller drew his gun and fired—point blank at Donovan’s back. The latter spun, staggered; before he could recover,

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Miller shot again. Manelli, too, had his weapon out and was firing it wildly.

Instantly the street was in an uproar. Children fled screaming, women shrieked, men raced for shelter; in the open windows overhead faces appeared.

Those who witnessed the excitement could make little of it at first, for all they saw was a confusion of scurrying figures and a man bent double, lurching, stumbling up the block as fast as he could go. Then they beheld two others, one standing upon the step of a taxicab; both were firing after the retreating figure. This was cold-blooded murder. There came loud shouts of protest, exclamations, curses.

Somebody threw something down at the marksmen. The first missile was followed by others—milk bottles, flower pots, anything that could be seized upon, crashed about them. A moment, then the gunmen ducked into the shelter of the cab and it rolled away from the curb, gained swift momentum, and rushed up the street and away. Their victim had reached the corner now, but there he stumbled; he was moving ever more slowly, as if his feet were shod with leaden shoes.

Officer Burke broke into a run as he beheld a man stagger, fall, then regain his balance and come reeling down the avenue toward him. The fellow collided blindly with pedestrians and they recoiled,

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then stared after him in a manner to indicate that he was not merely drunk. Some of them tried to halt him, but on he came, zigzagging, taking the whole sidewalk in his course. An instant, then out of the side street from which he had come poured an excited throng, crying: "Police!" "Murder!"

Burke paused, disbelieving his eyes. Jimmy Donovan! Running right into his arms! And the entire force on the lookout! Here was a piece of luck.

Donovan was close enough now to recognize him, and he called Burke's name, hoarsely, imploringly. His legs buckled under him again, and once more he sprawled upon his face, but he came to his knees and crawled forward until, like a sick retriever dog, he laid at the policeman's feet a packet wrapped tightly in a newspaper. It was red and shiny with his blood.

The gangster raised a face ghastly white and distorted with pain. "Here's a present, Boike," he coughed. "De McConnigle pay roll. T'irty-five hundred——" Then he collapsed.

Burke phoned the station a few minutes later, announcing:

"I've got the McConnigle money. Donovan had it, all right, and he was makin' a getaway. He gimme a battle, but I stopped him an' he's in the drug store now. Better send the ambulance."

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Kitty Costello did not spend that night behind bars. An appeal to Father Marron had brought him raging to the plant, and as a result of his scorching arraignment of her employer she had been allowed to go home. Nevertheless, it was a night of torture for the girl. Not for one moment did she credit Jim's guilt; to doubt his honesty was to doubt the genuine quality of his reform. It was to doubt his love for her, and in spite of the fact that he had never voiced his feelings, he had proved in a thousand ways that he idolized her with all the strength of his being. As a matter of fact, that certainty had put music into Kitty's heart.

She understood perfectly why he had fled, and to her it was anything but a confession of guilt. Panic had mastered him; he had yielded to a moment of weakness quite natural in one bred to his distrust of the law. Nevertheless, he had signed his own warrant, undone the careful work of months, and— and brought down Kitty's castle of dreams in irretrievable ruin. That was almost as hard to bear as the certainty of his peril. She walked the floor until the gray light of dawn stole in upon her, until the city awoke and began another day. She had always loved this city of hers, had always considered herself an intimate, vital part of it, and she had always thought it beautiful. But to-day she hated it. It seemed to her that it was an enormous, ugly,

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clanking machine, without heart or soul or sympathy. Yes, more than that—a monstrous, inhuman, wicked invention that destroyed weak men and helpless women.

She heard Father Marron's step on the stairs finally, and ran to admit him, then she fell back with a wordless cry. The priest entered with head bowed; he stood silently, his eyes lowered.

"What is it? Have they—got him?" Kitty gasped.

Father Dan nodded. "Be a brave girl. I've bad news." She motioned him to go on. "Jimmy's—hurt."

"Not—badly hurt?"

"Very badly. They say he's—dying."

"O my God!" the girl whispered.

The caller raised his eyes now and gazed squarely into hers. "Do you love him deeply? I thought so. What I have to tell you will hurt terribly, but it will bring joy to you, nevertheless. Jimmy has redeemed himself. He heard the call and he answered. If his soul goes to God to-day it will be a clean soul."

"Where is he? I must go——"

"Wait. Let me tell you what happened. It wasn't fear for himself that caused him to leave in the way he did; it was fear for you. He was afraid they would drag you off to prison, soil you with the smut of a horrid scandal, so he took a chance.

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Doyle told me everything. Jim went straight to his old pals and learned who the robbers were—some West Side crooks, I gathered—then he ran them down, waylaid them, and recovered the money. They shot him, for he had no means of defending himself, but he took the money to the nearest officer and gave it up. The police had him under arrest when I learned of it, and they were taking all the credit for recovering the swag and for the sensational capture of the robber himself. They were trying to sweat him! And the poor boy coughing the blood from his lungs and fighting for his last breath!”

Kitty Costello moaned and covered her ears.

“I straightened that out in short order,” Father Dan announced, grimly. “The papers have got the true story, so has Headquarters, so has McConnigle, and Jimmy Donovan’s going to get a square deal even if it’s his last one. Remember how I told Duryea that he was like those Car Barn boys who went to France? Well, he went over the top last night—for you, my dear. But he’s a gangster to the last. He won’t tell who shot him.”

“He *must* tell that. Does he know he’s going to——?” Kitty could not speak the word.

“Oh yes! They left no doubt in his mind. All he’ll say is, ‘The boys will get ’em.’”

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"Perhaps he'll tell us." Kitty crossed the room unsteadily and with shaking hands put on her hat.

Not until she and Father Dan were out in the street did she think to inquire about Midge.

"He asked for the boy, of course, and I've sent for him. I'm praying that they'll fetch him in time."

Outside the hospital several Car Barn boys were waiting. In subdued tones they asked the priest for news, but he could give them nothing more than the doctor's verdict as the police had passed it on to him. He drew Doyle aside and inquired:

"Do you know who shot him?"

"Sure we know."

"Then for God's sake, man, speak up! I can't bear to think of that boy——"

Doyle broke in harshly: "You ain't gotta do no thinkin'. An' de cops dunno how. We just been waitin' fer de bell. He was one swell guy, wit' a heart de size o' City Hall. Ain't nuttin' he wouldn't do fer a——" Spike's voice broke and he turned away. "C'mon, fellahs!" He and his companions departed silently.

They would not permit Jim to be disturbed, for a merciful anæsthetic had been administered and he was asleep, so Kitty and Father Dan waited. After a while the priest went away and the girl waited alone on a hard bench in a bare, inhospitable room

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that smelled strongly of antiseptics. She sat there until Midge was brought, until Father Dan returned.

When word came that they might go up, they found Jim awake, to be sure, but with eyes vacant and glassy from the effect of the drug. He babbled at them weakly, speaking like one in a dream, and when Midge began to sob Kitty took him out. Together they waited again, mingling their tears.

The vigil was unending. It was late afternoon when Kitty overheard a nurse and an orderly talking, and caught enough to bring her to her feet.

"What is it you were saying?" she inquired. "I'm Miss Costello. I'm waiting to see Mr. Donovan."

"Oh! You're the girl who was held up. Then you'll be interested. There has been another killing—over on the West Side. A fellow they call Cokey Joe Something and an Italian by the name of Manelli. The police think they're the ones who robbed you. Donovan's pals didn't wait long, did they?"

"I knew we'd hear something like that, sooner or later, when he refused to talk," the nurse declared. "We've had fellows like him before, and it usually happens——"

"Is he so badly wounded? Isn't there any hope?" Kitty implored.

"I don't know. He's not my patient. There is a priest with him, but I wouldn't give up hope, if I

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were you, for the war taught us how to work miracles with gunshot wounds. The doctor is in there now. Everything possible will be done."

With this slender comfort Kitty went back to Midge. Again she waited until Father Dan came for them.

"He's in great pain," the priest announced, "but the doctor says he has a chance." Kitty swayed and he steadied her. "Come, come! None of that! He's asking for you and Midge. It's my belief they were trying to scare him into talking and we've got to drive the fear of death out of him. I have a surprise for the lad and you must do your share."

Kitty and Midge came into the sick room, hand in hand. Jimmy smiled at them and the boy ran to him.

"Hello, kid! How's it breakin'?" Donovan murmured.

Midge covered his face with kisses and, bearing in mind what he had been told, he began, bravely: "Say, Jimmy, you ain't gonna croak. Dat's all de bunk."

"Coiten'y I ain't. Who said I was?"

Midge had done his share; he weakened now and began to cry hysterically.

Jim's face puckered with a spasm of pain; he looked up at Father Marron and at Kitty. "You gotta hand it to me for one t'ing," he said, wistfully.

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"I kep' tryin', didn't I? I'd 'a' made de grade, too, if dey'd gimme a chance. I'd a been his Big Brother."

Father Dan spoke earnestly. "You made the grade, Jimmy. I saw the judge this morning while you were asleep and I explained everything. He says you can have the boy."

"Honest?"

"Honest. All you've got to do is get well. We need more Big Brothers like you in the League. What do you say?"

For a time Donovan said nothing, but slowly his eyes filled, overflowed. "It's a bet!" he announced, then he turned his head toward Kitty and smiled radiantly. "A guy couldn't quit now, could he?"

Swiftly she came forward, knelt, and took his head into her arms. "You've got to live for my sake, too, Robin Hood."

Father Marron turned away. His lips were moving.

After a while Jim addressed him, and his voice was stronger:

"Father."

"Yes, Jimmy."

"You says once, it takes a tough guy to run straight."

"Well?"

"You was all wrong. It's gonna be a cinch for me."

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IN the deceptive light of early dawn the yacht looked three times her actual size. Not that she was small—Sabel Thorsen provided handsomely for himself in all things, and the accommodations aboard his cruising houseboat were ample—but to the occupants of the gunning skiff that drew alongside she bulked as big as a liner. As the man at the motor pulled the switch, putting an end to the bark of the unmuffled exhaust, he spoke:

“‘Crack o’ day,’ an’ here we be! Now, I bet the Big Cheese ’ll hang us up till nine o’clock.”

Mase Garfield, from his position on the forepeak, uttered a sibilant, “Sh-h, Cuby!” Then, as he made fast to the yacht’s landing boom, he inquired, “Want to get us fired before we begin?”

Cuba fended off the boat in tow with its heavy burden of decoys. In a voice both scornful and defiant, he declared: “No chance of them hearin’ anything. Not with that phonograph runnin’ wide open all night. They was dancin’, Mase—dancin’, an’ drinkin’ rum, an’ cuttin’ sinful capers. Think

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of ballin' the jack till one o'clock, with a sou'west breeze blowin' an' the brant stoolin'! Lord, what a battery day this 'll be! An' them guys plastered!"

Mase swung himself to the landing stage, then under his breath he said, authoritatively: "It's not for us to criticize our betters, especially them that puts bread and butter into our mouths. Understand? It's been a bad season for guides, and we're glad to take who we can get. Remember that, Cuby, and a lot of other things I been tellin' you."

"Oh, I'll remember! But you can't make me *like* this outfit, now can you?"

Mase laughed silently at his companion's characteristic ili humor—Cuba was a late sleeper and he always nourished an early-morning grouch—then he mounted the steps to the deck of the yacht.

Light shone from the main cabin windows, and from within came a tinkle of silver and china, advertising the fact that breakfast was being served. Cuba's pessimism, it seemed, was unwarranted; here, without going further, was proof that the luxury-loving Thorsen could rise early as well as dance late, proof that he was a sportsman, after all.

So this was the—well, the notorious *Gloria*, privateer of the winter fleet! Mase scanned his surroundings curiously and, even though the light was dim, he could see enough to warm the heart of any seafaring man. The *Gloria* was a gorgeous craft.

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This was a suitable anchorage for her, he reflected, for in years gone by it had been the favorite retreat of Teach, the pirate. Here it was, in fact, that the buccaneer had met his death. Mase had heard the story many times—how, after the body had been beheaded and cast overboard, it had swum thrice around the ship—and he believed it. There really was no doubting the story, for right down yonder at the inlet was the very island that bore Teach’s name, a witness to the grisly occurrence as unimpeachable as anybody could desire.

From all Mase had heard, this Thorsen was much the same sort of fellow as Teach, except that under no circumstance did he ever lose his head. No, Thorsen’s head was very well put on. But what had induced the man to stop in at this out-of-the-way place when it was the open season at Palm Beach and Miami? When those hunting grounds afforded such splendid sport of the particular nature that Thorsen enjoyed? He had passed here every winter for years at about this time, and never before had he halted. Queer. But there was no use speculating as to the whys and wherefores of a millionaire’s whims. Last night’s instructions had been concise—*viz.*, to be alongside at dawn with a double rig. The yacht captain had acted as Thorsen’s mouthpiece, and, with a selfish insistence akin to his master’s, had demanded the services of Mase Garfield and

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none other. None but the best was good enough for Thorsen, and he would pay double wages if Garfield chanced to be engaged with other sportsmen, so the skipper had said. It had been an irritating message, to be sure, nevertheless it indicated that Thorsen might be a regular fellow despite his reputation.

Mase lit a cigarette and studied the brightening sky. It was going to be a great gunning day, that was certain, for the wind was right, the tides were full, and the fowl were just getting together after the recent spell of bad weather. They'd stool to a straw hat on a day like this. Mase wondered if Thorsen had ordered a double box so as to take one of his guests along, or if he expected his guide to shoot with him. Most of these hard-hatted, stall-fed gunners followed the latter practice, being too soft and slow to get up in a battery. Not one in ten of them could hit a bull in the rump with a spade.

The door to the deck cabin opened and out into the faint gray light stepped a slim, rubber-booted boy in knickers and Norfolk jacket. Mase's heart sank. The next instant he straightened himself with a jerk and flung his cigarette overboard, for the boy was—a woman, a girl!

"You are the guide, I presume," she began. "I'm so glad you're on time." There was a momentary

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pause while she studied the man at the rail. What she saw was a well-built young fellow, roughly but warmly clad in Mackinaws. His jaw was square, his eyes were bold and direct, even reckless; his face was burned to a dark, smooth reddish brown. "Mr. Thorsen is not feeling well this morning. I wonder if you'd mind taking me out alone?"

Mase did not look like a bashful man, nevertheless he stammered something unintelligible.

"I've never shot geese," the girl ran on, hurriedly, "but I've always wanted to. I've heard so much about the hunting here. Mr. Thorsen put in on my account."

"It's like this—I got a double rig."

"What does that mean? I've always shot from blinds—pits, you know. You mean you can't——?" The speaker's tone became plaintive. "I'll be horribly disappointed. Couldn't you manage, somehow? I—I *must* get away—hunting, I mean."

Mase cast an apprehensive eye overside toward Cuba. "It's pretty far. It's an all-day job——"

"Good! The longer the better." After a furtive glance behind her, the girl stepped closer and lowered her voice, "I can take care of myself and I know how to shoot. I'm Western. I have my own shells and lunch and— What do you say?" She smiled up into Mase Garfield's face and he answered, shortly:

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"Come a-runnin'!"

Mase avoided Cuba's eyes as he led the girl down the landing steps and drew the launch close. Indeed, not until he had assisted her in and was about to cast off did he look at his helper. Then he said:

"Wind her up, Cuby."

"Where's the rest of the animals?" the latter demanded.

"Ain't any more. Let's go!"

Cuba remained petrified for a moment, then he bent himself over the engine and viciously spun the flywheel.

It was with a look of peculiar intentness that Dell Marshall watched the *Gloria* drop astern. After a while she breathed deep with relief, squared her shoulders, and turned—in time to interrupt a frantic interchange of signals between her two boatmen. Cuba was in the midst of an alarming facial contortion when she saw him, but he ducked his head quickly and hid his face in the engine box.

"Am I the first sportswoman you ever took out?" she inquired.

Mase grinned. "Yes'm. You'll have to put up with us till we get kinda broke in to the idea. I get used to things easy, but Cuby—he's queer." After a moment, "You'll have to make allowances for him; he swears a good deal. That comes from

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runnin' a two-cycle engine. You can ignore him complete, if you like."

Cuba rolled the mean white of an eye at the speaker and muttered something which was lost in the sound of the exhaust.

"My name is Marshall," said the girl.

"Miz?"

"No. Miss."

Garfield bowed, then he busied himself coiling the loose end of the towboat's painter. He told himself meanwhile that his passenger was even more attractive than she had at first appeared. She looked all boy in her very modish suit, nevertheless he felt certain that in the habiliments of her sex she would be quite stunning, in a purely feminine way; and while he had been prepared to find beauty among Sabel Thorsen's guests, he had not been prepared to encounter anything quite so frank and quite so unspoiled as this young woman appeared to be. That, doubtless, was a carefully studied pose, for lack of sophistication scarcely went with the reputation of the *Gloria*. An effective pose it was, too; Cuba showed that much by his stony, unblinking stare. His eyes protruded like a frog's.

"Whose yacht is that?" Miss Marshall indicated a small white schooner anchored some distance in-shore from the one she had just left.

"B'longs to a New Yorker name' Haskins."

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"Van Rensselaer Haskins?"

"Yes'm. Van, that's him."

"Really!" The girl regarded the yacht with sudden interest. "Van Haskins! What sort of person is he?"

"Finest ever!" Mase unhesitatingly averred. "He's a bear!"

For the first time Cuba raised his voice. "Nothin' like it. He's common."

"Common?"

"Commoner than dirt."

"I'm supprised at you, Cuby," Mase was mildly reproachful. "After all he's done for you, too!"

"He knows what I think of him," asserted the engineer. "I've told him often enough. I tell folks what I think of 'em an' I make 'em like it. He's a nut, miss."

"What do you mean by that?" queried the girl.

"Why, he's"—Cuba struggled for a word; he waved his grimy hands—"he's goofy! His money has spoiled him. You know, selfish! Pig-headed! Anything goes if it gives him a good time."

"Who give you the shirt on your back?" Mase demanded, hotly. "Who staked you to them waders when your feet was out?"

"What's a shirt to the likes of him?" Cuba barked. "Anyhow, it was too small for him. An' waders! Don't he *make* 'em? He's got fact'ries, miss, boot

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fact'ries, an' rubber fact'ries, more fact'ries than we got geese. But he won't have 'em long!" The speaker laughed shrilly, maliciously. "Not if he don't quit his sinful ways."

"He's a great hunter, Van is." Mase ignored the attack upon Haskins's character. "You'd like that in him, even if he is common. Most men are hunters of some sort. Some hunts birds and wild animals, and others hunts—bigger game. It's all in the way they do it. Mister Thorsen, I reckon, is a great hunter, too?"

Miss Marshall ignored the tone of this inquiry. "Indeed!"

"Ain't he?"

"I don't know."

"Um-m! Too bad he's sick. He'll miss a fine day."

Dell Marshall had a keen appreciation of types, hence it was not long before she became interested in these two banksmen. Cuba, it appeared, was a misogynist; a gloomy, carking soul, overcritical and acid of tongue; his companion, on the other hand, possessed a sunny disposition, entirely refreshing. Mase had a native intelligence, moreover, quite unusual in guides. For instance, not only did he know the habits of the wild fowl, not only could his practiced eye pick out a solitary redhead from a flock of bluebills when to Dell they looked like bees in

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the sky, but also he read a lesson from the nature of their flight, and even the call of the geese conveyed a message to him. He possessed an occult weather sense, too, and he was a good boatman. Wind and tide were his allies. He ran a zigzag course through a maze of intricate channels and shallow sloughs unmarked by beacon or buoy; his orders were given with a calm but absolute assurance. He was a youth of force. Too bad he had been denied scope for his larger abilities, Dell reflected, for eyes like his indicated a brain alert. What a good world this would be if people were permitted to make the most of what was in them. Environment is a hideous thing. It welds manacles to capable hands, it distorts growth, it stunts character, it crowds its victims into artificial molds. She knew something about that: something about missed opportunities and the weight of chains, for she, too, was manacled. As her mind reverted to the *Gloria* and to Sabel Thorsen she shivered slightly.

However, she had left all that behind; this was her escape, for a day at least, and, after all, she was young and well and out in the open where the ducks were on the wing. She made up her mind to forget all else and enjoy this respite to the full.

Arrived at the hunting grounds, Mase and Cuba left her in the launch while they put out the rig. Both men went overboard in their waders and

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although they appeared to work in harmony, nevertheless it was plain that they were having a heated argument, for the irascible, expostulatory tones of Cuba's voice came over the water. Poor Cuba! His simple soul was scandalized.

After a while they came for her in the empty skiff and poled her back in among the decoys. But when she looked down at the battery, weighted so low that its flat decks were almost awash, she hesitated.

"It will sink if I get in," she protested.

Mase reassured her, explaining, "You got to keep it low or the birds 'll see it."

"S'pose it does sink?" Cuba inquired, sourly. "It's shaller here."

"It looks like a—like a couple of coffins, side by side."

"Mr. Thorsen called for a double rig. We could of brought a single as well as not."

"Did he?" Miss Marshall looked up quickly. She frowned. Then, "What am I supposed to do?"

"Step in and lie down. I reckon one of us 'll have to shoot with you, for we ain't got enough iron to balance her. Cuby"—Mase grinned at his helper—"how about you——?"

"Not me!" the latter hastily declared. "I'm *married*."

Dell Marshall flushed faintly, but without fur-

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ther words she stepped into the battery and Mase followed her. "Don't be skeered," he laughed, when thin wavelets ran over the deck and she shrank back, "it's safe as a dory. Them burlap wings break the sea. You'll be suprised how nice and warm it is down there out of the wind. If it breezes up, all we gotta do is tie some of these iron ducks to the decoy strings and lighten ship."

Dell seated herself in her narrow boxlike compartment, lay back, and adjusted the folded slicker beneath her head.

"Comf'table?"

She nodded.

"Well, the first thing to learn is to keep down, but not so low you can't see what's comin' in. Fix your pillow so you can just see the heads of the decoys. Right!"

"Do you mean to tell me that wild geese will come to a thing like this? Without any cover whatever?"

"Sure. You just wait. We're below the water, and they can't see us unless they fly high. Distances will fool you at first, but I'll give you the word when to get up. You better shoot fours in that twenty-gauge; they're good all around. And lay the muzzle on the foot deck, so. Safety on? Good."

"I'm trembling like a setter puppy," Dell acknowledged.

Mase showed his clean, even teeth in a smile—

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they were very white against his brown face. "I believe you're a hunter," said he, "and I'm glad you come along."

Cuba returned to the launch. When he had lifted the anchor aboard he waved a wide, renunciatory gesture and yelled something to Mase, then he started the motor.

"What was that he said?" Dell inquired.

"He said he'd lay to down on Percy's Shoal."

Dell settled herself without further comment, but her ears were sharp and it had seemed to her that the engineer had cried, "And may the Lord have mercy on your soul!" Cuba was rapidly becoming a pest.

It was indeed surprising how comfortable one could be, snuggled down in the protection of the battery. The day was brisk and chilly, to be sure, nevertheless there was an agreeable warmth to the sun's direct rays and the lapping of the wavelets, the bobbing decoys, the occasional hoarse conversation of the live decoys tethered around the outer edge of the wooden stools, was soothing. Black specks, sooty strings and shreds were drifting along the horizon and Dell's eyes followed them eagerly.

Perhaps ten minutes had passed when she started nervously and cried, "Oh, look!" She seized her gun and half rose.

"Fisherman ducks!" Mase said without stirring.

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The birds flew over, peering inquisitively downward. The dry rustle of their wings was plainly audible.

"Did you see them coming?"

"Sure. I got eyes in the back of my head and in my elbows. Yonder's a coupla broadbills headin' in. Take your time."

Just over the rim of the box appeared two birds, two swiftly-moving club-soda bottles with wings. They swung up against the wind and came toward the decoys, nearer—nearer. Dell moved restively, but her companion said:

"Wait!"

On came the birds. They were in plain sight now, their markings visible. Dell felt sure they could see her as plainly as she could see them, for they were perhaps twenty feet above the water and their sharp eyes were busy. As they set their wings Mase cried, "Go to war!" and with the words he sat up.

Dell rose with him and fired her right barrel. The ducks flared at the instant she pulled trigger and the result was a clean miss, but with her second shot one of them fell.

"Atta girl!" Mase exclaimed. "Take a little more time on the first shot. You're goin' to make a hand."

"I missed the easy chance," she complained.

"Tain't everybody can score a double on broadbills. You centered your second load fine." Mase

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rose to his feet, stepped lightly upon the foot deck and then overboard. He returned with the dead duck and laid it upon the battery wing. "I like to wait on myself when I can," he explained. "Half the fun is lookin' at the birds, strokin' their feathers, and seein' how pretty they are. Spoils it, for me, to have somebody else pick up."

"Why didn't you take the one I missed?"

"Do you want me to shoot?"

"Why, of course! I hate to be babied. Let's play the game like two men. You like to shoot, don't you?"

"Like it!" Mase's expression was eloquent. "If I liked it any better, miss, it wouldn't be decent."

"Then you take the right-handers, and I'll take the left."

It was not long before three ducks stooled prettily and this time the twenty-gauge was deadly. After Dell had dropped her pair, the guide fired with apparent carelessness and killed the third.

"Redheads!" he announced, when he had retrieved them. "Ain't they beauties?" He laid a fine drake in Miss Marshall's hand and smiled at her exclamation of delight. "Dawg-gone! You shoot like an old timer."

"Oh, this is fun!" she confessed.

Next came a flock of brant, wheeling, darting,

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voicing their throaty call, but they were bound elsewhere and passed out of range.

"Foxy birds, them brant. They can look into the neck of a jug," Mase announced. Then he imparted a piece of genuine information. "We got practically all the black brant in the world, right here between Hatteras and Core Sound. This is where they winter and— Look out!"

"Geese! They're—coming this way!" There was a wait, then the girl's voice shook as she repeated, "They're coming!" An ecstatic thrill coursed through her body; she huddled lower, craning her neck just sufficiently to watch the long line of waving wing tips. There were perhaps twenty birds in the flock; they were flying low and straight and steadily. They were very near. It seemed impossible that they could approach much closer without discovering this clumsy ruse, without taking alarm at these stiffly bobbing counterfeits, for Canada honkers have sharp eyes and they are about the wariest of wild fowl.

"They're goin' to stool," Mase whispered. "Give 'em time."

The live decoys began an excited clatter and stretched their white necks; they were answered by the oncomers. With a cold, shaking hand, Dell clutched her shotgun and ceased breathing. Her heart pounded irregularly. She must shoot low,

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she must not lead birds the size of— She sighed deeply with disappointment and stirred, for the leader had lifted and was high enough to look down into the battery. He had taken fright, given the alarm. But, no, on he came, with the flock behind him. Dell could see the big gander's black, shiny eyes. He set his wings stiffly and volplaned; the air was filled with a clamor of calls; there was a confusion of flapping pinions, an avalanche of settling forms.

She did not hear her companion's order, she was not conscious of having risen to a sitting posture, but of a sudden she found the twenty-gauge at her shoulder and her cheek against the stock. Then, for an instant, time stood still; those hovering bodies hung as motionless as if suspended upon wires. After that—chaos! The first bird fell with a splash. Mase Garfield had leaped to his feet and was firing over Dell's head, other birds were crashing down, the live decoys were threshing the water to foam. A goose rose directly into line with the girl's sights and poised there with neck outstretched and pinions frantically beating the air. Dell felt the recoil of the shoulder pad as she pulled the trigger, then she saw her target throw back its head and let go. She uttered a shriek.

“I did! I did! One with each barrel!” She dropped her gun and clapped her hands exultantly.

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"I'll say you've got the eye!" Mase chuckled.

"My first goose! Oh-h, I'll never forget it! I thought I'd suffocate. It's—it's *wonderful*! The thrill, the excitement!" She continued to chatter incoherently, while the guide gathered in the drifting trophies and tied them among the stools.

It was in a wholly different tone that she inquired, when Mase finally lay down, dripping, in his side of the box, "What is this—this hunting instinct? It isn't a desire to kill. It isn't cruelty. I'm as tender hearted as anybody and I love birds and animals. We're not cruel, are we?"

"Certainly not. It's something nobody but a sportsman understands. Mighty few women know what you're talkin' about when you try to explain. They can't figure why we don't get the same sensation from murderin' meadow larks as from shootin' quail. They don't understand why we can't pot a bird settin' still. It all goes back to the time when we lived by bow an' arrow, I s'pose; back to the days of the chase when a man used his stone hatchet and his bone spear and when he yelped and capered around his kill. I s'pose them hairy women used to ask their men why they took a chance spearin' saber-tooth' tigers when there was so many soft-shell turtles in the front yard, easy killed with a stick. Prob'ly *they* couldn't understand it, either."

"You don't consider it wrong to take life?"

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“Wrong?” Mase shook his head. “We’re meat eaters. Created that way. All nature is destructive. The strong preys on the weak, the intelligent lives off the less intelligent. Yonder’s an example, now.” He indicated a flock of gulls wheeling over a sand bar. The tide had fallen away and the birds were “clamming”—bearing clams aloft and dropping them upon the bare ground. “Lookit! If the shell don’t bust open the first time, they take it up higher. Who taught ’em to do that? Nature. Most every living thing you see in the air or under the water is hunting some smaller living thing to kill and eat. Birds, beasts, fish, men—they’re all alike. The big ones eat the little ones. Wrong? Why——”

“You don’t have to convince me,” the girl interrupted. There was a pause. “All the same, it isn’t pleasant to think about when you’re one of the weak—when you’re the prey.”

Mase had not erred in saying that this would be a great gunning day. It was all of that. The breeze freshened enough to wet the battery decks, and with the turn of the tide the birds flew. Geese, brant, ducks, they came in singles, in doubles, and in flocks, and the shell boxes grew lighter. Dell Marshall realized that perhaps never again would she enjoy a day’s shooting like this, therefore she refused to return to the launch for hot coffee. Instead she and Mase ate their sandwiches lying down and between

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shots. The wind, the excitement, had made her ravenous; there was a color in her cheeks and a brightness in her eyes that awoke the man's intense admiration. Then, too, her unexpected skill with the little twenty put him on his mettle and he shot as he had never shot before.

It was shortly after their lunch that he called her attention to an unusual sight. "Look!" he cried, sharply, at the same time raising himself to his elbow. "Notice that big hawk?"

"Yes. He's chasing a sea gull, isn't he?"

"So I thought. But it ain't a gull, it's a brant. A *white brant*!"

"A *white* brant?" Dell sat up. "I never heard of such a thing."

"I never saw one before. They don't happen once in ten years. Dawg-gone! He's pretty."

A moment and Dell realized that she was witnessing one of those grim tragedies of the sky, of the wild. The brant, a beautiful thing, snow white except for its coal-black beak and wing tips, was in terror. It darted, it dove, it circled in frantic efforts to escape, but the wide-winged bird of prey pressed close. Pursued and pursuer were about evenly matched in speed; when the hawk closed in it struck, and the victim uttered a high-pitched cry of fright. They were out of range, nevertheless the sound of those blows, whether of wing or beak or talon, were

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plainly audible. The flight carried the birds high, then low, backward and forward, in erratic loops and circles.

"Gee! I'd give my shirt for that brant!" exclaimed the guide. "I'd have it mounted." The pursuit swept past, the cries grew fainter. Mase sighed and shook his head regretfully. "I'd give a hundred dollars for a shot—if I had it. A *white brant!*" He continued to stare intently after the pair. Of a sudden he stiffened, for the birds had wheeled and again were drawing nearer. He fingered his shotgun. "Poor little devil!" said he. "That hawk's got him winded."

"You can't reach him from here," Dell cautioned; but the man was sitting erect now and the gun was half raised. A moment, then he sighted, slowly, deliberately. He fired; there was an appreciable lapse of time before the shot struck, then, oddly enough, the hawk flared, one of its wings crumpled, and it fell, fighting, clawing, twisting. It lay upon the water, striking viciously at its wounds.

"Bless your heart!" Dell Marshall cried. "That was the peachiest shot I ever saw."

"Stretched my gun bar'l about a foot," he admitted, with a grin.

The girl continued to regard him curiously. "It wasn't a miss, was it?"

He shook his head.

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"Then, why didn't you kill the brant?"

Mase shoved another shell into his gun. "There wasn't time for more 'n one shot."

"You'll probably never see another white brant. Why did you shoot the hawk?" the girl insisted.

"Why——" Mase hesitated, he raised his eyes defiantly. "Tell you the truth, I don't like hawks."

It was considerably after dark when the hunters returned to the *Gloria*; their arrival was greeted by expressions of genuine relief.

"We were getting worried, my dear," Sabel Thorsen announced as he met his guest at the rail. "Mrs. Rumely wanted me to send out a relief party."

Mrs. Rumely herself appeared at the moment. She had flung a wrap over her bare shoulders, and she presented a striking picture, with her emotionless white face framed in her famous crown of red hair.

"What ever detained you?" she began, coolly. "Were you shipwrecked or something? I've been on the verge of hysterics."

While Dell was making her excuses, out from the cabin came Thorsen's three male guests. The second cocktail had been served and they surrounded the huntress, inquiring as to her luck.

"I wagered Sabel you wouldn't get a brace," Rumely told her, cheerfully. "I tried bird shooting,

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but I couldn't hit 'em. Don't tell me I've lost?" Rumely was a fragile man, several years his wife's junior. He had once been a cigarette salesman, but he never referred to it.

"Wait and see." With shining eyes, Dell pointed overside.

There came a chorus of exclamations loud enough to summon the two other women, and meanwhile Cuba passed the day's bag up over the rail to Mase Garfield.

"Do you mean to say you shot all those fowl?" Mrs. Rumely was astonished. "My word! What uncanny skill!"

"'Uncanny'?" Rumely groaned. "Unbearable! Unforgiveable! It's a disaster."

"Honestly, now, did you do it or did the guides?" It was Thorsen speaking in his deep voice.

"She had her limit by two 'clock," Garfield declared. "Then we went ashore for jacksnipe. She's the best woman shot I ever seen. Ain't many men could do that good with a twenty-gauge."

Rumely pawed at his host and demanded, in shrill tones, "You've got to give me a chance to get even, Sabel. I'll lay you five hundred that she kills two to your one to-morrow."

Thorsen deliberately turned his massive back upon the speaker, but the latter was insistent.

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"Come on and lose a bet for a change. I'm goin' to show you up."

"That's not a fair bet," Miss Marshall protested. "I'm a pretty good marksman and battery shooting is awkward. I'm not sure Mr. Thorsen would even care to try it."

"So much the better for me——"

"I don't pretend to be a good shot," the yacht owner said, sourly.

"Five hundred she beats you, Sabel. You owe me a chance to get even." Turning to the guide, Rumely inquired, "Is it a good bet?"

"I'll take half of your end," Mase answered, with a broad grin.

Mrs. Rumely addressed her husband irritably. "Don't be a pest, Joe. And you, dear," she spoke to Dell, "run along and dress. We're all nearly famished."

But the youthful helpmate of the chaperon was not to be put down; he gloried in the appellation of pest, so he declared; he asserted that his nuisance value was at least five hundred dollars and he proceeded to resubmit his offer in varying detail until finally Thorsen said:

"All right. All right! I'll take you—provided I feel up to it in the morning."

"Aha! There's a joker, as usual. Headaches are barred, old bean. There's no disability clause——"

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Thorsen exposed his white shirt front to the guide; gruffly he said: "You and your man go forra'd and tell the steward to give you a drink."

"Thanks, but we don't use it," Garfield told him.

There came a choking sigh, almost a moan, from Cuba, who was passing the birds overside.

It was nearly midnight. Dell Marshall dropped her hands from the keyboard of the piano, saying:

"That's all I can sing to-night. I've had a long day and I'm tired."

"You're not going to bed at this hour?" Thorsen queried, in dismay.

The girl nodded. "You'd better do the same if you're going to get up at dawn."

Now the owner of the *Gloria* had no faintest intention of shooting on the morrow—not after Rumely's wager. He was a vain man; ridicule he could not stomach; and to be bested by a woman at any undertaking, he considered nothing less than a humiliation. Moreover, there were certain reasons why he did not wish to appear to poor advantage before this particular girl; therefore he spoke evasively. His plans for the next day would depend upon his mood, upon the weather. It might be well to run on to Beaufort, inasmuch as his other guests had put in such a stupid day. Noting the disappoint-

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ment that clouded his hearer's face at this suggestion, he asked:

"Do you want to stay over and try it again?"

"I don't want to be selfish——"

"We shall remain here as long as you wish," he told her, quickly. "It is you who gives orders here." When Dell found no response to this statement, he went on: "It's worth something to see you look as you do to-night. And when you came in from the hunt! Eyes like stars! New color in those lovely cheeks!" Gently he pinched one of the lovely cheeks, and it was only by an effort that the girl kept herself from flinching at his touch. "Yes, and your figure in that boy's suit— Gad! You were irresistible!" The speaker's massive hands closed, slowly, significantly; into his voice there came a thick quality, an emotional timbre that sent a chill of apprehension through his hearer. He had been drinking, as usual, and in his eyes was a smoldering fire that Dell had learned to dread. What a fool she had been to come along on this cruise! There was no protection, either moral or physical, in the presence of these other people, for they were Sabel Thorsen's abject vassals and he took no pains to conceal that fact. He listened to their chatter, he amused himself with their antics, but he despised them, and even the women he treated with a poorly veiled contempt that was terrifying in its suggestive-

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ness. How weak, how futile, was the will of one girl against the determination of a man so strong, so masterful as he! And what forces he had at his command!

When Dell rose to go he insisted upon walking with her, and at the door of her stateroom he halted her by laying a hand upon her arm.

She shrank visibly this time. "Please! I told you, last night——"

"I fear that you do not fully appreciate the one invariable rule of the *Gloria*—the principal ship's article, as it were," he said, smoothly. "It is this: see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing. It is typified by those three bronze monkeys in the main cabin. I invite no guests except those whose discretion has been proven; in other words, the deaf, the dumb, and the blind. It means that the *Gloria* is the safest ship afloat for a careful woman. You understand?"

"I'm very tired," the girl protested, but Thorsen did not move.

"You may rest absolutely secure in the knowledge that——"

Dell interrupted him wildly: "Why don't you play the game fairly? I'm doing my share; I'm keeping my part of the bargain."

"Was there a bargain?" The speaker raised his brows incredulously.

"You know there was." Thorsen's nonchalance,

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his unhurried manner of going about this matter, bespoke a definiteness of purpose, a certainty of success, that was maddening; it made Dell feel like a toy, a prize over which he could close his hand whenever he chose. "You know why I came on this cruise. You promised I'd have a rôle at the Metropolitan if I came along and—there were no other conditions. You said Mrs. Rumely——" The speaker's voice broke hoarsely. "Mrs. Rumely, a chaperon!" She regained control of herself with an effort. "I'd sacrifice almost anything to realize my ambitions—almost anything. Can't you see what it means to me, Mr. Thorsen? I have the voice. I've worked so hard, so long. . . . Your influence would——"

"Of course I understand what it means to you or to any singer," he broke in, placidly. "My influence is probably greater than I have led you to believe. Your voice is superb. Novensky's verdict on that point is enough, and he declares, too, that you have genuine dramatic ability. A magnificent voice, the ability to act, and beauty such as yours are an irresistible combination. You are thrice blessed, my dear child, so why worry? Why do you continue to beat your foolish wings?"

"Because I want you for a friend—not an enemy."

"Precisely!" Thorsen nodded and smiled. "That shows you have good sense—another insurance

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against failure. Haven't I told you a thousand times, haven't I shown you in a thousand ways, that I am your friend? Haven't I promised to make you the most brilliant success of our times? Your enemy? Nonsense! Are you not the mistress of this ship? Are not your orders supreme? Those fools! those apes!" He jerked his head in the direction of the main cabin. "Why, I'd make them walk the plank in their evening clothes if it would amuse you."

"You—have set a price upon my career that—that it isn't worth. There are other roads to success."

"None whatever! I'm something of a czar and my nod is final. All other roads lead to failure; all lead back home, to the little Western town. You couldn't bring yourself to that, now could you? You have too much fire, too much spirit, too much temperament to allow yourself to fail miserably, especially when the prize is so great and so nearly within your grasp. You can be a queen——"

"Wouldn't it be a satisfaction to perform a disinterested action, to give a girl the chance she has honestly earned? And I *have* earned it."

"Without price?"

"Without price. But with the reward of a life-long gratitude."

The financier pondered this novel thought in some

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amusement. "I fear it would give me no satisfaction whatever."

"Yet you claim to be a patron of the arts?"

"True. No man admires the beautiful more fervently than do I. I worship it passionately—beauty of color, of tone, of proportion; beauty in marble and in flesh. But I have never derived the slightest satisfaction—that is your word—from beholding another's possessions. If I like a treasure sufficiently to covet it, I buy it, no matter what the cost. Frequently I pay too much."

"Some things are not for sale."

"Those I take."

The girl gasped, but Thorsen quieted her with a slight gesture of impatience. "Can't you see how I feel about this? I'm tired of buying and of taking. I could—well, encircle you in my arms, have my way with you at any time, for I'm absolute master here and consequences never concern me, but for the moment, at least, it pleases me to endure restraint. The thought of your voluntary surrender vastly intrigues me. A hundred times a day the mere sight of you brings me a thrill. No, the bargain stands, for I am certain of its fulfillment."

"In other words, it wouldn't stand if you thought you might lose."

"Knowing all the circumstances, all the facts, I cannot envisage such a thought. Good night! And

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may your dreams be as sweet as mine." He bowed and pressed his lips to Dell's bare arm.

With numb, shaking fingers Miss Marshall bolted the door of her stateroom behind her, then she collapsed upon the chintz-covered chair in front of her dresser and for a long time she sat there, strained, wide eyed, her hands stiffly interlocked. She knew the worst, at last. Sabel Thorsen had finally put into words that which she had more than suspected but had steadily refused to believe, that which she had desperately tried to hide from herself, and it left her horrified. The man was implacable, resistless, cruel. He was a bird of prey, an eagle. No, he was a hawk, that very hawk she had seen earlier in the day, and she was the white brant, circling, twisting, darting hither and yon in a vain effort to evade destruction. God! If only somebody would shoot him!

Mase Garfield, for one, was not disappointed when, on the following morning, Sabel Thorsen sent word that he was again indisposed. The guide, in fact, made no secret of his pleasure, and he even hurried Dell Marshall's departure as if fearing that the yacht owner might at the last moment experience a miraculous recovery. He was in buoyant spirits, was Mase; not a care was on his mind and Dell's mood, so different to-day from what it had been on

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the morning before, had little effect upon him. He made himself entertaining in a hundred ways and he brought reluctant smiles to the girl's face. After a night such as she had put in, it was pleasant to surrender herself to the protection of a fellow apparently so clean, so capable, and so crystal clear as he. Mase, like Thorsen, was a strong man, but what a contrast to the multimillionaire! Here was a person who positively radiated honesty of purpose and—well, protection. In spite of the fact that he was a stranger, Dell had to struggle against a perfectly foolish, womanly-weak desire to confide her troubles to him and demand his help. He had pity for hunted things; he had helped that white brant. This was hysteria, of course, and now was no time for panic. She banished the thought.

It proved to be another glorious day, and the brant stooled in such numbers that lunch time found the bag limit filled. Dell could not bear to return to the *Gloria* a moment earlier than necessary, therefore she and Mase spent the afternoon wandering aimlessly among the dunes on the ocean side of the island, watching the surf, digging wells with clam shells, and molding wet sand men. As is ever the case when worries are deliberately laid aside, the hours raced by.

They were back on the launch; the chilly dusk had come. Cuba was laboriously warming up the

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motor, meanwhile earnestly execrating the inventor of gas engines, the makers of coils, the refiners of gasoline. Their names were anathema to him. Under her breath, Dell began to hum a song, that being a habit of hers when she was preoccupied. As the motor finally began its rapid explosions and the craft gathered way, she raised her voice in time to the vibrations.

"You can sing, can't you?" Mase said, in quick appreciation.

Dell came to with a start. "You bet I can." She spoke with complete conviction, but quite without pride.

"Would you sing something for me?"

"Of course." At the first full-throated note the helmsman straightened himself, and thereafter he stood rigidly, scarcely breathing. Cuba, too, was dumfounded; his vinegar visage softened, an unsuspected warmth of feeling shone from his bright eyes.

It was the beautiful "Some Day He'll Come" from "Butterfly" that Dell sang and her mood was such that she put perhaps more feeling into it than ever before. When the last note had died away Mase saw that she was weeping real tears and that her shoulders were shaking. Cuba clapped his hands explosively, then, ashamed of his outburst, he crept into the tiny forepeak.

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"That's the best singin' I ever heard," Mase acknowledged in a voice curiously hushed. "Nobody ever sang better than that. Why, you're good enough to be in a theater."

"Yes. I studied for grand opera."

"Are you a—a star?"

"No." Dell wiped the tears from her cheeks. "I thought I was going to be—last night—a sudden, brilliant shooting star, but——"

"You're the shootin'est star I ever saw." The guide made an effort at levity.

"I'll never sing in grand opera."

"Why not?"

"Because—the price is too high: it's more than I can pay."

"Pshaw! I s'posed those singers got big salaries. I didn't know they had to pay."

"I thought so, too, but that's all I knew about it. Shooting stars fall and I don't want to be a fallen star." From the tone of Dell's voice, Mase inferred that new salt tears had stolen out upon her lashes.

"That's too bad. And your heart set on it, I s'pose! I figured you could afford anything, bein' on Thorsen's yacht that way."

Dell spoke wretchedly: "I'm the poorest girl in the world. I haven't a dollar, and what's worse I haven't a friend."

"Isn't Mr. Thorsen——?"

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"*Thorsen!*" The name was fairly spat forth.

"*I'm your friend,*" Mase said, gruffly. "So's Cuby. I'd go to hell for you."

In wordless gratitude Dell laid her hand upon that of the speaker, nor did she resent it when his fingers impulsively closed over hers. She was lonely. Her fear of Sabel Thorsen, that terror which she had managed to subdue for the time being, took her by the throat and shook her. She was in a mood to derive comfort from sympathy of almost any sort and Mase was the kind of man who makes a good friend. Dell had never fully appreciated, until she felt his strong hand over hers, how young and virile he was. And he was a killer of hawks! What a pity it was that——

"Seems like we've known each other a long, long time," he was saying, under his breath. "I don't take to many people like I took to you. I wish I could help."

"I wish you could."

"You can know some people a long time and never get acquainted with 'em. Others you know from the ground up the first time you see 'em. That's how it was with you, and—I kinda feel as if that's how you must of felt about me. Is it?"

"Yes, Mase."

"I don't go much on appearances. There's Thorsen, for instance. It ain't money or education or fine

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manners that count, it's character: it's a man's heart. There's a lot worse things than—than marryin' a pore man." Mase met the girl's startled upward glance, met it unflinchingly. "You think I'm bold. Well, I am. I shoot quick and straight."

"Are you—able to marry?"

"Able?" Garfield smiled. "When a man's old enough, he's able enough if he's any kind of a man. Yes'm. Able an' willin'."

"Have you ever been in love?"

"Not till lately. Have you?"

Dell shook her head. "I could never marry unless I were in love."

Mase nodded his approval of this sentiment. "What's more," said he, "I bet if you did care enough for a man it wouldn't make much difference who or what he was—whether he was a yachtsman or—a guide. I have foolish theories like that, once in a while, and I like to try 'em out. Anyhow, that's the only sort of a girl *I'd* be crazy about."

"I'm afraid you give me credit for more courage than I possess. I'm not very brave."

For some time they remained silent; then Mase said: "We're due for a storm to-morrow. S'pose we go after snipe."

"I'm afraid the yacht will be leaving. The others are getting restless."

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"You goin' on to Florida with Mr. Thorsen?"
The question was swiftly put.

"No. I'm going back home, at once. I'm leaving at the next port."

"Stay over here," he urged, eagerly. "I'll find you a place to stop. The snipin' will be great, and it's close to town."

"I couldn't do that. You don't understand. Perhaps we won't sail, after all."

But Sabel Thorsen put an end to any such vagrant hopes by paying off the guides upon their arrival at the yacht and by announcing that he would weigh anchor in the morning.

Dell had a word alone with her shooting companion when she bade him adieu. She was not offended when he said, earnestly, "I'll never forget these two days, miss, and I hope you'll remember 'em, too."

"I will. Good-by and—good hunting, friend. You have taught me to shoot straight."

"It ain't good-by. We're goin' to shoot together again, sometime. I'm goin' after them snipe alone, to-morrow, for I got a lot of heavy thinkin' to do, an' I think best when I'm by myself. Remember this, if you want me, if you need help, I'll hear your call, even if you're in New York."

"Good-looking chap, that guide," Mrs. Rumely said before Garfield was out of hearing. "Guides, my dear, are quite the smart thing lately."

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"Beats the devil the independence of these people!" Thorsen growled. "I offered him double pay and he refused it."

The *Gloria* did not sail in the morning, for a storm signal was flying from the "station" flag pole, the glass was falling, and a brisk westerly wind had whipped the waters of the sound to milky whiteness.

Dell Marshall, ignorant of the portent of these signs, had eaten a hasty breakfast and had gone on deck for a last glimpse of the village. There Thorsen found her.

"We're hung up here for another day at least," he announced, irritably. "I wouldn't mind a little pounding, but Mrs. Rumely is ill already at the mere prospect and her manly husband is drooping like a lily. Gad! I'm fed up on these Hudson River sailors!"

Dell had seen a motor boat making up the banks toward the snipe marsh and had waved at it. A sudden impulse induced her to say:

"If that's the case, I think I'll take my gun and go ashore."

"Good idea," Thorsen nodded. "It's deadly stupid aboard."

Dell experienced a genuine thrill as she slipped into her hunting costume. What ailed her, anyhow, to feel thus at the prospect of spending another day with Mase? She shook her head in bewilderment at

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herself. An ignorant, uncouth guide, who scarcely spoke her language! She cared nothing for him, that was certain, for she had known him but two days. No, this haste, this eagerness, was prompted by a panicky desire to avoid contact with Thorsen, especially while he was in this dangerous mood, not by any wish to see more of the other man. The clash with her host would come soon enough; this delay was a blessing.

The tender was ready and waiting when she came out on deck, but she halted at sight of Thorsen in rubber boots and reefer, a shotgun over his arm. He observed her start of dismay and there was little mirth in his smile when he explained,

"I decided to go along. Happy thought, I call it."

He assisted her down into the launch and seated himself beside her. Never until this moment had she appreciated how huge he was, and when they had cast off she would have given anything to be safely back aboard the *Gloria*.

Thorsen did not speak until they passed close under the stern of the Haskins yacht, then, challenged by the lines of the vessel, he said: "There's a real sea boat, and Haskins is a real sailor, I believe. I'll bet *he* doesn't lay up for weather."

"Mr. Haskins appears to be a sort of sea-going hermit." Dell welcomed any topic of conversation.

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"Don't you yachtsmen ever call on each other? I supposed that was a part of the etiquette——"

"He's gone back North, I believe." Then, after a moment, "Haskins a hermit! Ha! He'd be the last person to stand on etiquette if he knew I had some good-looking women aboard." With swift, bold strokes Thorsen painted the character of his fellow yachtsman as he had heard it, and the colors he applied to the sketch were not pleasant. Noting his hearer's expression when he had finished, he smiled broadly. "Poor child! Another dream shattered, eh? We idle men are pretty much all alike, my dear. There's this difference between Haskins and me, of course: he inherited his money, I made mine. But we both spend it in about the same way. You'll discover that when you become a great star and meet the people whose names you see in the society columns. Fellows like he never taste the full fruit of their blessings, for they lack patience, they don't know how to endure repression. They gulp their wine; I sip mine."

"I think I shall avoid that set if they're all like Mr. Haskins."

"My dear child, you are provincial, narrow, Presbyterian. Great artists cannot be Puritans. And you are going to be a great artist." The speaker laid his thick, muscular white hand upon Dell's knee and her apparent acceptance of his last

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confident assertion did much to improve his temper. He became more genial; when they quitted the tender and walked up the beach he was in quite a pleasant mood.

Oddly enough, the girl experienced a somewhat similar metamorphosis. Her courage sprouted in the sunshine, the wind whipped it into leaf. What had she to fear from this or any other man, she asked herself? Her life was her own; no Sabel Thorsen had power to mold it to his purposes. When the *Gloria* had docked at Beaufort she would tell him her decision and he would scarcely dare try to prevent her leaving. If that made of him an active enemy, so much the worse for her immediate prospects, but—the total wreck of her career, if it came to that, was better than acceptance of his aid, in view of what went with it. She felt quite calm as she loaded her twenty-gauge.

The English snipe had arrived in large numbers. They got up from every bog hole, from every little meadow between the patches of high salt grass, but they were hard to hit in this wind. From over near the distant fringe of bay and live oak next to the sand dunes came the report of another gun, probably Mase's, so Dell headed in that direction.

Sabel Thorsen, on his part, had little luck with the darting birds, and his heavy weight made the walking hard for him: he lunged and wallowed; he

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was red of face and short of breath when they finally came out upon firmer footing.

"That's quite a pull," he confessed, and, seating himself upon a soft, dry bed of bent grasses, he wiped his wet face. Out here in the open the mighty financier, the elegant, was just an awkward, inept, clumsy man, and Dell experienced a mild feeling of superiority over him. She was smoothing the feathers of the birds she had killed and chatting absent-mindedly with him when she was startled to hear him say:

"The *Gloria* is an able boat and we can save a day by going outside."

"Don't you intend to stop at Beaufort?" she inquired.

Thorsen shook his head. "I'm eager to get south, into the palms and the orange blossoms. You'll love it——"

"I am not going any farther. I am going to leave the *Gloria* here."

"What?" Thorsen looked up quickly.

"I have decided to go home. There is a mail boat that runs across to the mainland."

There was a momentary silence; then the man spoke harshly: "So—you've changed your mind. You've weakened."

"No. My mind is exactly as it was."

"Um-m! I suspected as much. That's why I

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came ashore with you. You are quite—set? You realize, do you, what you are throwing away? You are closing the door on your career; it's the end of you, artistically."

"So you declare. That remains to be seen."

"I've reached the end of my patience," he said, rising slowly. Dell rose with him. "I've sipped my wine long enough. I'm thirsty."

"What do you mean? You can't——"

"You poor little fool. Don't you suppose I foresaw something of this sort? You're not going home. You're going to stay with me as long as I wish you to stay. I have my own way of dealing with quitters."

Thorsen's anger struck fire, and Dell answered with a heat equal to his, "We part company, here and now!" Her face was white.

"We'll see about that."

A sudden fury flamed in the man's eyes, but at his first movement Dell uttered a cry of warning and snatched her gun from where it stood. In spite of his size, Thorsen was catlike in his quickness; his hand closed over the barrels as she raised them. For an instant, they tugged at the weapon, Dell struggling weakly against his vastly superior strength; then she let go her hold and fled.

With an oath, he made after her, and at sound of his pursuit, her courage turned to terror. In spite

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of her panic, however, she retained sufficient presence of mind to direct her feet back into the marsh. Out across the wet, spongy ground she fled, running like a fawn, and the ruse gained time for her. Thorsen's boots sank beneath him, he plunged, he floundered. Neither of them could go rapidly, of course, and, despite the fact that Dell opened a considerable space between them, Thorsen's bullock vigor overcame much of his handicap and after the first dash she could not appreciably widen her first advantage.

There had been no opportunity to choose the direction of her flight, and Dell realized that she was heading up the island, away from town. The marsh opened up before her, a mile-long waste, devoid of life except for a few head of half-wild cattle. She remembered the echo of that distant gun, Mase Garfield's gun, and she began to call his name in a wild, strangled voice.

It was hard running in her rubber boots; soon the breath left her lungs. It was necessary to double and twist and turn between the fields of high marsh grass, for, once entangled in that, she knew she would be like a bird enmeshed.

Thorsen slipped and fell. She looked back in time to see him spring to his feet, muddy, dripping. He was cursing. On he came like some monster risen from the ooze.

He ceased running, finally, and fell into a swift,

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long-striding walk. Between his labored breaths he laughed mockingly, for Dell had come out upon one of those wide black creeks that wound blindly through the marsh and she had been forced to turn back toward higher ground. She was dismayed, confused. Her pursuer altered his course so as to head her off.

"Mase!" she was crying. "Mase!"

Thorsen ran her down, cut off her retreat. He approached her slowly where she stood at bay, saving his breath for the effort of dashing in and seizing her as a hunter seizes a wing-broken snipe. It seemed to Dell that she was dying, that she had run until her heart had burst. Thorsen was muttering profanely, but she could not hear what it was he said because of the roaring in her ears.

He was almost upon her when an amazing thing occurred. Before her eyes the tall marsh grass through which he plowed was suddenly whipped as by a driving gust of hail. Dell heard the whistling particles cut through the spiny tops, heard them shower upon Thorsen's body, heard him yell in sudden fright and pain. With his cry came the loud reverberation of a shotgun.

The millionaire had been stricken. A thousand hornets had stung him simultaneously, and the shock of their poison rocked him in his tracks. He clawed wildly at his chest, his arms, his body; he shouted

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again, hoarse with rage and anguish; he bellowed curses.

"Hello!" came a startled cry. There was a crashing among the bushes to Dell's left, then over the tops of the billowing marsh growth she saw a familiar cap of gray mackinaw. She sank weakly to her knees, her eyes closed, her body sagged limply, while the world spun round and round in 'dizzy, sickening gyrations.

Dell Marshall did not faint, nevertheless it seemed like a long time before she could understand what was being said.

"That'll be about all of that talk." Mase Garfield was speaking in a voice altogether new to her. "I've apologized once, which is right often for me."

"Damn your apologies! I'll get you for this," Thorsen shouted.

"You'll get nobody. Accidents will happen. How d'you s'pose I could see through that brush?"

"Is he badly hurt?" Dell inquired. She staggered to her feet, to see that Thorsen's coat was off, that his shirt had been ripped open, exposing his bulging, hairy chest and one naked arm. His white skin was pock-marked, spattered with tiny wounds from each one of which ran a thin trickle of red; his throat, his cheek was smeared with blood.

Mase looked up at her and nodded. "He's hurt bad enough to see a doctor. If it was me, I'd pick

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'em out with a pocket knife—they ain't more 'n a quarter of an inch deep—but rich folks get blood poisonin' easy——"

"God! I'm in agony!" the millionaire groaned through twitching lips.

"Them number eights is hot, all right, an' there's enough of 'em to fill a hip boot, but our ole Doc is used to diggin' 'em out of green sportsmen. My skiff's right here in the creek an' I'll have you back to town before you know it." Mase rearranged Thorsen's shirt and flung the coat over his shoulders. "Unfortunate, that snipe gettin' up right in line. Wouldn't happen once in a thousan' times. But you're lucky, at that, Mr. Thorsen. It might of put your eyes out."

"Sympathetic, aren't you? Well, it won't prove a lucky day for you, my fine fellow. I'll have you in jail before night."

"Too bad, but we 'ain't got any jail on the island." Mase grinned. "It's one of the modern conveniences we poor people have to do without. You see, we have so few strangers it don't hardly pay to keep one up."

"It was criminal carelessness," Thorsen growled as he followed in the wake of the guide. "I'm not sure that you didn't do it purposely."

"Yeah?" Mase lifted Dell into the skiff, then he bent to the motor, leaving his victim to clamber

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overside unassisted. "If I shot you apurpose how come I didn't give you the whole load? You ain't easy missed."

It was a half hour later. Mase's launch lay beached in the little harbor at the village; he and Thorsen were in the doctor's house. Dell had proffered her aid, but the yachtsman had gruffly declined it, so now, finding it impossible to sit still, she wandered up the sandy road that served as a main street. The town itself was sprawled loosely around and about a high, white lighthouse; the weatherbeaten dwellings were set down at random amid luxuriant growths of cedar and of fragrant bay bushes, through which meandered many paths and crooked roadways. The water's edge was lined with net racks and fishing gear; from the decoy pens came a ceaseless quacking of ducks and honking of geese.

Dell came to a store upon the square front of which was painted, "Amasa Garfield. General Merchandise." Curiously, she entered. So Mase was more than a guide; he was a merchant as well. It was a clean place and amply stocked; it was pleasantly redolent of the mixed odors of such a place. A young man was busied at a pair of scales in the rear.

Dell sighed wearily and sank upon a bench near the door. Here was sanctuary. Mase would find her here and tell her what was best to do. She was

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still badly shaken, and Thorsen was still to be reckoned with. When the clerk came to wait upon her, she said:

"I'll just sit here until Mr. Garfield comes, if you don't mind."

"You'll have a right smart wait," the youth told her, with a friendly grin. "Mase is sick abed; been laid up more'n a week with lumbago."

"Then it's his son—Mase, junior."

"Ain't but one Mase Garfield I ever heard of."

"Why—how queer! He's been guiding me——"

"Oh! Prob'ly Mase got one o' the boys to take his place. He's the best gunner on the island an' ever'boday insists on hirin' him. We *got* some good guides here."

After a time Dell rose again—she was too nervous to remain inactive—and she was pacing back and forth near the doctor's house when the man she knew as Mase came out. He strode swiftly to her and began:

"I saw you dodgin' him and heard you call. Thank God I got there in time, like I told you I would! Now we're goin' to move quick 'cause you're through with that buzzard." He took her by the arm and hurried her toward his skiff.

"I refused to go any farther with him; told him I intended to stop here. That's why—that's how——" The girl's voice broke. "Oh, I'm glad

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you were near!" They were in the boat now and leaving the shore.

"He's breathin' vengeance and snortin' fire. Every time ole Doc digs into him he invents a new punishment for me."

"He's a dreadful man. He has a way of doing things——"

Mase laughed shortly, confidently. "Me, too. I got *my* way of doin' things. He thinks he's a rough guy—got hobnails in his boots. Yeah! But say, he don't know how rough a guy can get!" There was something so positive, so belligerent, so triumphant, in the speaker's voice that Dell looked at him in surprise. This was a new Mase.

"Where are we going? Where are you taking me?" she queried.

Garfield was staring inshore, toward the doctor's house; a gloating triumph curled his lips. When he turned, she saw that his eyes were gleaming, that there was a steely glitter in their depths. "I'm taking you home—to my home," he declared. "I said we'd shoot together, again: I said it wasn't 'good-by.' Well, it wasn't. You've seen the last of that bird." Again he flung a glance over his shoulder.

Dell Marshall noted for the first time the course the launch had taken. It was headed away from shore and it bore directly toward that other yacht. She understood now—saw everything, and the truth

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brought her to her feet with a smothered cry. "So!" She met the man's startled gaze and spoke bitterly "You—saved the white brant for yourself, Mr. Haskins!"

"I did. How did you——? *Here!*" Van Haskins dropped the tiller and lunged forward barely in time to seize his passenger before she leaped overboard. "What the devil——?" He spoke harshly; he held her firmly, despite her struggles; his face, too, had gone white.

"Let me go!" With her free hand she beat at him furiously. "What do you think I am? O God! How I hate you!"

"Are you crazy? Listen to me." He shook her roughly. The skiff had fallen off; with his foot he thrust the tiller over and straightened the course.

"*You*—a killer of hawks! You're a hawk yourself. I know all about you." Dell continued to writhe in his grasp. "Let me go."

Haskins's face was set in a scowl. If anything, he tightened the grip with which he held his prisoner. "Not until you've heard what I have to say. It was a dirty trick, masquerading as I did, but I was bored—thought it would be good fun to get aboard the *Gloria*. Thorsen always has a shipload of pretty women and I hadn't seen one for weeks. Hathaway, he's my factory superintendent—he didn't want to do it, but I made him play Cuba."

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"Pretty women! Of course. Mr. Thorsen told me exactly what you are."

"Oh, *did* he? How does he know?"

"You posed as a real man; you lied to me. All the time you were planning to rob him of his prey. Let me go."

"I'll never let you go. Hathaway says I'm mad and I ought to see a doctor. So I am, thank God! and—a doctor might cure me."

Dell uttered a moan and buried her face in her hands. More gently he said: "You called me and I came to you. I'll always come at your call. Why are you afraid?"

For a second time she asked him, "Where are you taking me?"

"Home. New York. We sail in ten minutes."

"And then?"

"Uptown—to the shops, where you'll probably want to buy——"

"And after that?"

"Why, to the Little Church Around the Corner. Where else?"

"Then you're not—? Oh, Van! Van!" The girl swayed forward and hid her wet face against his bosom. With a yearning cry he closed his arms about her.

"My dear," he said, huskily, "something tells me that I owe Thorsen the left barrel for the reputation

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he gave me, but you should have known better. I'm not a bird of prey.”

Mr. Eldon Hathaway leaned over the rail of the Haskins yacht and offered a sarcastic suggestion to its owner.

“Hey, Van!” he called. “If you really want to come aboard let me know and the next circle you make I'll heave you a line.”

Van raised his face from its concealment in Dell Marshall's disordered hair; with an inclination of the head he smiled: “That's Cuby. He's queer, and we'll have to make allowances for him.”

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ON his way uptown from the pier where the South American liner had docked, Gordon Kent stopped his taxicab to buy himself a felt hat. This done, he drove a hard, brown fist through the crown of his eighty-dollar Panama. When he had arrived at his hotel he removed his pongee suit, rolled it up, together with all the warm-weather clothing in his trunk, and presented the bundle to a bell boy. He was fed up on all things tropical, all things Spanish.

That night he dined extravagantly at the most expensive eating place in New York, saw the "Follies" from the center of the front row, and later took a table at a popular dancing café. He did not dance, for the new dances and even the new music were strange to him; he spoke to nobody except his waiter; nevertheless he was drunk with pleasure when he went to bed, about two o'clock. He would have stayed longer, but a swarthy man and a dark-haired girl had begun some sort of tango and that had caused him to flee.

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As a man, Kent was forty-five years old; as a social animal his age was about twenty-two, for, following his graduation as a mining engineer, he had gone West, and soon thereafter he had been sent on to South America. There, for more than twenty years, he had remained—not steadily, of course, for as he worked his way up into control of the property, necessity had taken him north to the States and even across to the Continent. But those occasional trips had been hurried, they had been all business; invariably he had been called back to the mines earlier than he had expected.

By all the rules of precedent he should have become Latin-American in his likings, he should have married some Peruvian woman and adopted South America as his home. But nothing like that happened. He had learned to adapt, but not to adopt. Spanish women bored him, Spanish customs irked him, Spanish cooking turned his stomach. He remained a thorough Yankee and but one ambition burned within him—namely, the ambition to go home with the leisure and the means to make up for the twenty years he had wasted.

He had attained that goal. His means were large, his leisure was unlimited. Physically he was young. His first concern was to find a suitable dwelling place.

His requirements in this were peculiar; there-

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fore he sought counsel from one of his few friends, William Sothern. Sothern, head of the great international detective agency that bore his name, was himself a detective, but not the detective of fiction. He was a smiling man of sixty, inordinately proud of his small feet and hands, and he possessed the blessed knack of inspiring friendship. Men great and men obscure called him "Bill" and came to him for advice upon matters ranging in importance from world politics to divorce. Success had made of him less a thief-taker than a man-helper.

"You've steered many an ex-convict straight," Kent told him. "I want you to steer me, for I've just done a twenty-year stretch. I'm free, at last. I want you to help me live forty years in the next twenty."

Sothern laughed. "A man with your physique and your money can live forty years in ten, if he sets his mind to it."

"I *have* set my mind to it." Kent's square jaw was aggressively outthrust; his deep set eyes were eager. "All my life I've wanted to play, to be amused, to live, and I've never had the chance. I've always craved luxury, laughter, lights, the blare of brass, but I've had to live in lonely places. I'm fed up on garlic and mandolin music and the flare of fireflies. I want noise and smoke and jazz and gasoline and white shoulders."

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"You've hit the right place."

"Coming downtown this morning I took the subway so as to be squeezed in the crowd and feel elbows in my ribs. I loved it."

"How can I help?" Sothern regarded his caller curiously. Kent was a grim, homely, rugged man. He had a reputation for ruthlessness.

"You can help me find a home right in the noise, right where the street cars clang and the Elevated roars, and the newsboys yell—right where the city will talk to me day and night."

"No trouble about that, Gordon."

"And you can help me get acquainted with people who play. Twenty years, Bill! Every hour counts. I'm eager to begin. Do you think I'm a fool?"

"Most men make fools of themselves when they begin living in pajamas and evening clothes. But you're too hard-headed to be seriously injured—and, after all, somebody must play the fool and pay for our white lights. Let's go to lunch."

"Gladly," said Kent. "But no olive oil or onions, understand?"

Kent took an apartment on the busiest corner he could find—a corner in the hotel and theater district, where the traffic boiled by day and where the sky line blazed by night. Huge, winking electric signs glared into his windows, his home floated upon a sea of sound. There, with bedlam beneath his feet,

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peace came to his soul. He reveled in his nearness to things, he slept like a babe. He was lonesome no longer, for he walked with Joy. Money ran from him and each night brought new adventure. Broadway opened her arms and took him as her own; he lay upon her throbbing heart.

He did not dissipate unduly, he merely played as men play, seeking pleasure with the same eagerness of purpose he had sought success. He made acquaintances recklessly, for he took people at their own appraisals so long as they amused him. He entertained lavishly, keeping an open house; and all the introduction anybody needed was a ready laugh, a song, a story, or a blithesome spirit. Mining men from out of town, Wall Street men, men from the clubs, the theaters, met at his home. And women from here and there. Most of the women were young and good looking and some of them were clever.

Bill Sothern dropped in one night after a late supper to find a score or more people entertaining themselves at Kent's expense. A team of headliners from vaudeville were at the grand piano, Kent's Chinese house boys were serving drinks. It was a noisy party, but the least hilarious member of it was the host. He was genial, but he held himself aloof, and Sothern inquired:

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"What's the matter? Is the gilded life beginning to pall?"

"Not a bit of it," Kent told him, "but I don't quite fit in yet. I'm rough and awkward and—too intense. I'm afraid to let go."

"That's not your reputation. Indulgent Pittsburgh never sent us a spender with less restraint."

"Why shouldn't I spend? I've no reason for saving."

"You seem glad of it."

"I am. Don't you understand? I'm free. I'm the only free man in New York, and my folly injures nobody."

"You may not find it easy to remain free. South American millionaires don't happen every day."

"Marriage?" Kent laughed and shook his shaggy head. "If I went into 'society,' if this were a Park Avenue crowd and I had mothers to deal with, there might be some danger of that. But none of these girls have mothers. They're lovely, amusing, obvious little creatures, and any one of them would pawn her last limousine to land me. Blackmail, perhaps, but marriage—never."

Sothorn nodded. "You can afford blackmail. Marriage would cost you too dear."

Broadway, as far north as the Circle, was Kent's playground at first, but in time he went afield—down to Washington Square, and up into the duplex apart-

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ment district. Greenwich Village bored him, for he was too genuinely Bohemian to be deceived by an artificial assumption of Bohemianism; mediocrity masquerading under the eccentricities of genius was not even amusing, so he drifted northward.

One night he attended a party given by a California acquaintance who was spending the winter in New York. It was quite an elaborate affair, given in one of those twelve-room studio apartments near the Park; among the guests were a number of people who had done things—bankers, sportsmen, writers, painters, musicians—nevertheless, it was an informal party and the guests felt free to introduce themselves to one another.

Kent's attention upon entering the room was attracted by a good-looking blond woman. Invariably blond women drew his eyes, for he could see no beauty in brunettes. This young woman was very blond and the more he looked at her the more he marveled that others did not appear to share his enthusiastic appreciation of her charms. It seemed strange that she excited no more attention than she did, for to him she was strikingly beautiful. Drawn, no doubt, by the intensity of his regard, she looked at him and he experienced a genuine thrill. He had a drink with his host and asked who she was, but the latter did not know—he never remembered

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names; probably she was a friend of somebody he had invited.

Kent managed, by and by, to speak to the woman, and again he was thrilled when she answered him pleasantly and without the slightest constraint. She regarded him with sudden interest when he introduced himself; then she made herself known. Her name was Selbee. He liked the sound of that, and when he said something to provoke a smile he made the amazing discovery that there were two deep dimples in her cheeks. He was put completely at ease upon learning that she was not particularly brilliant—he had feared she might be one of those women who “did things”; an author or an artist of some sort—and he got along famously with her.

After a while they found a comfortable couch on the balcony above the crowd, and soon Kent made still another amazing discovery—he discovered that he was a voluble, a brilliant, and an entertaining conversationalist. For the first time in his life he was all that he had ever longed to be.

They danced together, and the man experienced a tremendous, breath-taking exhilaration at feeling this lovely milk-and-honey creature in his embrace. Physical contact galvanized him and there was an intoxicating perfume to her hair. Her evident enjoyment of his society bred in him a Godlike confidence.

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Prohibition had come, hence there was more than the usual amount of drinking, and Kent did his share, but he found less intoxication in his glass than in the contemplation of Norma Selbee's ash-blond hair, curling above her smooth neck, and in those adorable dimples that answered so swiftly to his smiles.

As for Miss Selbee, she did no great amount of talking. There was no need to do so, for she possessed the rare knack of giving interested attention. When finally it became evident to her that this Broadway notable, this South American Crœsus, was actually wooing her with tempestuous fervor, she became almost reticent and began to study him with troubled, speculative eyes.

He told her of his Andean experiences, of his twenty years of exile—matters he seldom mentioned, and by the time they went in to supper she knew him almost better than he knew himself.

Later that night he asked her to marry him. She had told herself that something like this was coming and she had tried to stop it, but the man's force of will had defeated her; despite her efforts to hold him in check, he had swept her along on the flood of his desire. Even so, his declaration of love came as a shock that left her speechless, white. She stared at him almost fearfully, before murmuring:

"You—scarcely know me."

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"True. But I know you well enough to want you."

"You've told me all about yourself—not that it was necessary, for everybody knows something about Gordon Kent—but I'm not a public character. I'm—nobody."

"Thank Heaven for that! I love you."

"To-night, perhaps! But to-morrow? Next month? A year from now?"

"I'm not a child," Kent declared, almost roughly. "I haven't looked for love—never expected it—but it came, and I don't propose to let it go."

"Men don't marry women like this," she protested, with more agitation than she had yet displayed. "They want to know who they are, what they are, all about—everything. I'm no child, either. You're not the first man who—the first to ask me something like this." Kent nodded impatiently. "What makes you think I love you?"

"I haven't asked if you love me. I love you. That's enough for me. That's all I can grasp at the moment. It's a good deal to happen in one night; it's a good deal to think about."

"No, no!" She shook her head. "You wouldn't buy a mine this way; risk everything you have——"

"Indeed I would. I did. I always do. I move fast and I trust my hunches. Listen. I'm rich, I can give you everything. And I will."

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Miss Selbee halted him with a gesture. "I know——"

"Of course I'm not the first man. You're beautiful, you're desirable. How could I be the first? The miracle is that you're here at all, and free. To hell with who you are, where you came from, or what you've done. I'll take my chances if you'll take yours. We can't live the past over again, but the future is ours and it's all we're entitled to. I'm not much. I'm full of faults, but—I know the woman I want. Will you marry me?"

"Sometime, perhaps."

"To-night!"

Miss Selbee uttered a strangled refusal, but Kent took her cold hands in his and forced her to meet his gaze. For what seemed a long time she sat motionless, her eyes searching his with a curious expression of mingled apprehension and desire. She stirred finally. She sighed wearily, her lids fluttered, lowered.

"Come!" he said and drew her to her feet. "My car is waiting. Do you want to tell your friends, or bring them along?" She shook her head.

Like a person under a mesmeric spell she took his arm; mutely she waited while he brought her wrap and placed it about her snowy shoulders. Kent, too, was deeply agitated; he could find nothing to say; so in silence they went down in the elevator and out

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to his automobile. But when the car door had closed behind them and they were alone, he drew her close and kissed her.

The unexpected gentleness of his first caress snapped the woman's rigidity, her body relaxed, and with a quivering sigh she surrendered herself to his embrace. Her soft lips, the fragrance of her breath, made a drunken man of Gordon Kent.

The midnight marriage of Gordon Kent and Norma Selbee excited little comment, for almost before it became public they had sailed for Europe, and so even those newspapers that specialize in sensational copy found little to report beyond the bare facts. They carried a highly colored story of Kent's career, to be sure, but they could learn almost nothing about the bride, therefore they described her as a beautiful society girl and ran the picture of an obscure motion-picture actress.

The ship upon which the honeymooners sailed was several days out before Gordon Kent felt well enough acquainted with his wife to call her by her first name, but by the time they had tarried a while in London, had shopped in Paris, had toured the château district, and had arrived at Alexandria en route up the Nile, he had run the entire gamut of emotions from infatuated lover to gentle and considerate husband. He proved to be a generous husband, too, and he

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took enormous delight in showering expensive gifts upon his wife. Her extravagances amused him and he never quarreled with her bills. Lacking any sort of taste in women's clothes, his part in the selection of hats and gowns and such things was confined to an enthusiastic admiration of her judgment. But he gave her *carte blanche* and, as a matter of fact, he urged her to spend more money upon herself than she was inclined to spend, for her beauty was a never-failing source of wonderment and pride to him and he could not understand why others did not worship her as he did.

The selection of her jewelry, however, he took into his own hands, and before long Mrs. Gordon Kent's gems became a topic of conversation wherever she went.

They settled in Cairo for the winter, entertained lavishly, and went out a good deal. Their apartment at the most famous hotel became a headquarters for visiting Americans and members of the resident English colony.

Norma Kent rose to the requirements of her new position very creditably indeed. Not only did she scrupulously observe the niceties of dress and deportment, but also she made a new man of her husband, externally at least. Of course Kent was too old, too firmly set in his mold, to change greatly, and at heart he remained the massive, passive man

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of restraint, but he took on more geniality, more polish, and they made a distinguished couple; the husband dominant, strong, commanding; the wife winsome, gracious, and alive with youth.

Kent lived by a code of his own which was inflexible, and, remembering the words he had uttered that night during his whirlwind courtship, he never asked Norma any questions about herself. He knew, vaguely, that her past life had been unhappy, but he adhered to his promise and respected her evident desire to forget. He sometimes wished that she would tell him something about her former husband, Selbee; what sort of man he was and the reason for her divorce, but since the subject was painful and inasmuch as his prime object in life was to spare her pain, he never voiced his curiosity. After all, it was none of his business and he was not a Paul Pry. The future was rich enough in its possibilities for happiness.

In one thing, however, he acknowledged that Norma disappointed him a trifle; that was in her complete, her immediate, nay, her enthusiastic adaptability to foreign life. She it was who had suggested this trip abroad, although he would have greatly preferred a honeymoon at home, and now it seemed to him that she actually preferred living here, or in Europe, to living in the States. This was not at all in accordance with his desires; in fact,

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he was already hungry for his native land and looking forward eagerly to their return. Still, that was so small a thing that it gave him no serious concern.

It was only natural that two people so opposite in tastes should make separate friends. Kent tried his best to like the people his wife liked, and when he failed he forced himself to tolerate them. Among these latter was a young American of French-Irish ancestry, one Laurence Regan Marchmont. Marchmont was about everything that Kent was not; he was handsome, young, entertaining, and witty. He was elegant of figure, he was chivalrous of bearing and soft of speech; in his dark eyes glowed a light of deviltry quite thrilling to women. It was rumored about the hotel that he was somehow connected with a title. Of this fellow the mining man would have been mildly jealous had it not been for his implicit faith in Norma. He told himself impatiently that envy prompted his dislike, and it was characteristic of him that thereafter he set himself the task of being especially nice to the fellow and on more than one occasion he arranged for Marchmont to act as Norma's escort.

Long before the end of the season Kent acknowledged himself bored by Egypt. Norma, on the contrary, loved it. Her friends were adorable, the weather was perfect—when she spoke of New York it was without enthusiasm.

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The last few weeks of their stay was immeasurably cheered, for the husband, by the arrival of William Sothern. Bill was dodging the cold and the wet and he had his golf bag, so he and Gordon spent most of their time together. In the detective's company, Kent found so much enjoyment that he surrendered his wife more than ever to the care of Marchmont.

Accommodations had been arranged. It was a week before sailing time when the blow fell.

Kent and Sothern had dined together at the Country Club, and, insasmuch as Norma and Marchmont were playing bridge at the home of some English friends, it was nearly midnight when the two men returned to the hotel.

Sothern watched his companion mount the wide stairs to the mezzanine floor, then he lit a final cigar and took a turn through the Winter Garden. He had finished his smoke and was on his way to his own room when he saw Gordon Kent coming down the stairs again. Kent descended heavily; his face was colorless and drawn; in his hand he held something white, a letter.

Sothern stepped swiftly to him, saying, sharply: "What is it, old man? Something bad?"

Kent nodded. When he spoke it was in a feeble far away voice. "I was looking for you. Read that!"

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Sothern took the letter and read:

DEAR GORDON,—I can't stand it any longer. I tried, but it was useless. It was just another mistake. You've been kind and I hate to hurt you, but, after all, I couldn't give what I never had. There was no promise of love when I married you—scarcely a pretence on my part—and now I've learned what love is, what it must be, so I'm going away. Please don't look for me.

NORMA.

Kent was talking. "I tiptoed in so as not to awaken her, but I knew something was wrong—things scattered around—lights burning. It gave me a fright—I thought she was sick."

Sothern inquired, sharply, "Did she take her jewelry?"

"Yes."

"Any money?"

Kent shook his head. "She's gone, Bill. Gone! I'm all—alone again. Sudden, wasn't it?"

The detective cursed savagely. "It wasn't sudden; you just didn't see it coming. I wanted to warn you, but I hoped— Of course it's Marchmont."

"Marchmont! *Marchmont!* By God——!"

"Sh-h! Not so loud. Pull yourself together. It's going to be all right." Sothern led his friend out of the hotel into the night.

For a long while the two men trudged the streets, and after the first stunning effect of the catastrophe

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had passed it was Kent who did most of the talking. He tried to make excuses for his wife's conduct. There were reasons—she was young and the wine of life was sharp within her; she was impulsive, emotional, as a woman should be; he was old and harsh and uninteresting; he had deceived her, in a way, by making her think he loved excitement and variety when, as a matter of fact, he was stupidly quiet and conventional.

Sothorn listened without comment.

But when Kent began to realize more clearly the cruel advantage Norma had taken of his simple devotion, grief hardened into anger.

"I'll get 'em!" he cried, hoarsely. "The world's a little place and I've got nothing to do but get even. I'll find 'em, somehow, somewhere."

"If you really want to find them, it will be easy," Sothorn told him. "I'll have them located in a week."

"You think so?"

"I know so. There aren't a half dozen places where they could or would go. It won't take me long to find where Marchmont is. To find out *who* he is, of course, will require a little patience."

"*'Who* he is'? You can learn that at the hotel."

"Perhaps. On the other hand, men don't always tell the whole truth about themselves. Or women,

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either. How much do you know about your wife, for instance?"

"What d'you mean by that?"

"You knew nothing about her when you married her."

"I don't know a great deal now," Kent admitted. "You understand the circumstances. I've never felt free to ask questions and—she never told me much."

"So I imagined. Now let me handle this in my own way. It isn't my first experience in affairs of this sort. We'll leave here to-morrow, and by the time we reach Naples I'll probably have something to report."

It was in Naples, a week later. William Sothern had finished reading a bundle of cable reports from his New York office; he sat in deep meditation for some time before he rose and walked into Kent's room.

The latter had changed surprisingly in seven days; his face was thinner, whiter than formerly, and his homely, irregular features were thrown into more rugged relief. He had slept but little and in his sunken eyes was a feverish glitter. He had become moody and quiet—dangerously quiet. He looked up to ask:

"Did you get any news?"

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"I did. They're in Nice at the Hotel Royal. We can lay hands on them in twenty-four hours."

Kent came to his feet slowly. "That's good. Let's go."

"Wait!" Sothern was still frowning. "Are you really in love with—that woman?"

Kent exposed his teeth in an ugly grin. "What do you think?"

"Answer me, please."

There was a pause, then, "I'm not quite sure whether I love her or—hate her."

"It makes a difference," the detective said, gravely. "If you hate her, it's all right. If you—don't, then it's all wrong and we'd better drop things where they are."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean this: she isn't your wife, and never was." Kent did not appear to grasp the significance of this amazing statement, so the speaker continued: "She is a careless woman—remarkably careless. She neglected to get a divorce from Jim Selbee."

Slowly the mining man's face took on an added pallor; it became ghastly. "That's—*bigamy!*" he cried.

"Exactly. I suspected there was something wrong. I don't want to hurt you unnecessarily, but you'd better know the whole truth. To begin with, she isn't even an out-and-out adventuress; she's an

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imitation; she's phony even in that. She was born Lizzie Oakley, in Sacramento. Her father was a plumber. She went on the stage at a Frisco music hall and finally worked her way up to leading woman in a stock company. I've got all the dope right here. She worked opposite an actor named Jim Selbee and married him. He was a drunk; they soon separated. She's like a good many stage women, Gordon; she has played at making love so much that she can't take it seriously; life is all a romantic drama and you're just one of her several leading men. There may be others like you, for all I know. Now then, there isn't much you can do except send her back to the States and convict her of bigamy."

Kent uttered an oath, then he fell silent, scowling somberly.

"What about Marchmont?" he inquired.

"I'll get his record to-morrow, if he has one."

"Have it sent on to Nice. Let's go get 'em, Bill."

Two men were waiting when Sothern and Kent descended from the train at Nice, an operative of the Sothern Agency and an officer from the Paris Bureau of Secret Police. For perhaps ten minutes the four men talked, then they drove to the Hotel Royal. After a brief conference with the *concierge*, they were shown to the apartment of Monsieur and Madame Marchmont.

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The French officer tried the door, but it was locked; then, in answer to an inquiry from within, he cried, dramatically:

"Open, in the name of the law!"

There was a moment of silence, the sound of whispering. Marchmont himself opened the door. He was in a royal-blue velvet lounging robe; his silk shirt was open at the throat. At sight of his callers he recoiled; he made no effort at resistance when they filed past him.

The reception room of the handsome Marchmont suite was in disorder and it was blue with cigarette smoke. It was a hot day, nevertheless the windows were closed; there was the heavy odor of perfumes. On the mantel were goblets of stale wine; here and there were vases filled with wilted flowers; scattered about were articles of wearing apparel and French newspapers.

Norma, in charming negligée, was seated at a breakfast table, but at the intrusion she leaped to her feet, pale and frightened. Gordon Kent was the last to enter, and when she met his menacing, feverish eyes she uttered a cry, swayed weakly, and slid to the floor.

The American operative spoke first. He addressed her roughly, saying:

"Snap out of it, Lizzie Oakley! Don't pull a fainting scene."

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"Lizzie Oakley?" Norma raised her wide blue eyes, into which had come a new and wilder terror.

"You heard me. Get up." The detective strode toward her.

"Don't lay a hand on her!" Marchmont cried, furiously. "This is an outrage. This lady is—is——"

"This lady is—what?" Sothern inquired, sarcastically.

"She is—she has done nothing to warrant this indignity. I'll answer to her husband."

"You'll answer, all right. But not to her husband. He happens to be somewhere in America, and he probably wouldn't be interested, anyhow."

There came a gasping cry from the woman; she buried her face in her hands. To the open-mouthed Marchmont, Sothern continued, biting: "You have been victimized, young man. So has Mr. Kent. But he merely considered her his wife, whereas you considered her a great lady, a wealthy woman, and therefore desirable prey. She's neither. She's the wife of a cheap actor, and, outside of the jewelry and the clothes Gordon gave her, she hasn't enough to support you for a week."

"Good God!" Marchmont cried in a horrified voice.

"A sad awakening for love's young dream, isn't it?"

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"The money—of course that means nothing"—the Adonis in the royal-blue robe managed a careless gesture—"but the other—! I don't believe it!"

"Nevertheless, it is quite true. She was a mediocre stock actress. You've hung around dressing rooms; you must know a hundred like her. Her fine society airs and her French phrases, that's all stage stuff—'East Lynne' and 'Camille'! For a bright young-man-of-the-world you are easily deceived."

Norma spoke now. Tearfully but defiantly she said: "It's true—in a way. But Selbee and I were divorced in the eyes of God. I never loved him. I never loved any man until I met Larry. I've made mistakes. What woman hasn't? But I've suffered for them. You don't understand about Selbee. Now you try to rob me of the one real love I ever knew. Larry dear"—beseechingly she held out her arms—"you won't let it make any difference? You're too noble——?"

In the momentary silence that ensued, Marchmont drew himself up to his full height; he assumed an air of dignity.

"If that is all you have to say, gentlemen, I wish you good morning."

"It isn't quite all."

"Tell *her* the bad news," Gordon Kent exclaimed, harshly, and Sothern turned to Norma.

"It's a good joke all around, Lizzie. We've spoiled

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the whole day for your noble lover, but you'll be shocked to learn that he put it over you as badly as you put it over him. Fact! His name isn't Marchmont. It's McClure—Tommy McClure. He's a man of leisure, all right; he loafs whenever he can get a woman to support him. And he has a title, too. Among the cabaret set in New York he's known as 'Taxi Tommy,' because of his unusual knack of acquiring ladies' jewelry in taxicabs. He's a professional escort. He sees 'em home and steals their lavallières. You're wanted on at least one charge of bigamy, Lizzie; he's wanted in forty places for larceny."

"That's a lie!" stormed the woman.

"Is it? Look at him." Sothern resumed, in disgust. "You're a pair of cheap grafters and there's no credit in turning you up. This hero of yours lives off women, usually middle-aged women whose husbands 'don't understand them.' You're probably the youngest, best-looking dame he ever grabbed. He's a crook, of course, but not a first-class crook—just a wife comforter. He wheedles pennies from flower girls and borrows rings from romantic old women. He's a petty, pawn-ticket pirate; the dancing cafés are full of 'em. New York got too hot for Tommy, so he danced over to London, then to Paris. We've got enough on him so he can't go home, and this French officer will keep him doing

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short stretches until he has a long beard. A fine pair of boobs, aren't you?"

Norma Selbee's face was ashen; even her lips were white. She stared at the resplendent Marchmont with eyes of tragic misery. As for that dashing blade, he had shrunk; beads of perspiration had gathered upon his classic brow; he shot furtive glances from one hostile face to another. When he encountered the horrified gaze of the woman he hurriedly dropped his eyes.

In the oppressive silence that ensued, the stale atmosphere of the room became more noticeable. Sothorn turned to his friend:

"Well, Gordon, we've got 'em. What 'll we do with 'em? These French jails are nice and dirty——"

Kent spoke in a tired, monotonous voice. "I've had murder in my heart for ten days. I'd kill this rat now, here, if she loved him or he loved her. But they don't. They hate each other—or they will. They owe me a lot and they've got to pay. They've amused themselves by playing at hypocrisy. I'm going to make 'em *work* at it. Jail? They're afraid of jail. Well, I'm going to make 'em long for it."

Sothorn regarded the speaker uncomprehendingly.

Kent went on:

"I guess there's some Spanish in me; anyhow, I've been thinking it over ever since we got McClure's

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record, and things have broken just right. You've got enough on 'em so they're at your mercy anywhere, any time. All right. Make 'em live together the rest of their rotten lives. That 'll do me. Here are my orders and I want 'em carried out at any cost. Follow these two, day and night, wherever they go, if it takes a hundred coppers. Make 'em live together as man and wife, and *make 'em live straight!* Send me a written report every day. I like to read."

"That will cost a lot of money, Gordon."

"I'm rich. Think of my satisfaction in joining two loving hearts!"

"The world is a big place, and they'll live a long time."

"The longer the better. It won't get good until they've tried it awhile. That's where my Spanish comes in. Now get this: if either of 'em turns a crooked trick, give 'em the works, throw the book at 'em. That's all, Bill. Let's go."

Norma Selbee and Laurence Marchmont took the Midi Express for Paris. They were followed to the train. During the long night ride they had little to say to each other, for there was nothing much to talk about. Gone entirely was the glamour of the past few weeks; romance was dead and they saw each other only as Sothern had painted them—com-

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mon, sordid grafters—criminals under suspended sentence. Neither of them slept; it was a tiresome trip.

"Kent didn't mean what he said," Marchmont declared at one time. "What's more, his scheme won't work."

"No?"

"Certainly not. He can't make us live together."

"You think we'd better—separate?" Norma inquired, curiously.

Marchmont flushed. "Why, of course—for the time being. I'm in bad with these French police; no use of making it worse. I'll go to the Grand."

"Very well. I'll find some other place to stop."

When they reached Paris, Larry separated his and Norma's luggage and, calling two porters, instructed them to place the bags in separate taxicabs. He was startled when a stranger tapped him on the shoulder and said, politely:

"Monsieur has made a mistake, without doubt."

Marchmont paled. Norma turned upon the speaker with blazing eyes.

"How dare you?" she cried.

"You and your companion will be kept under constant espionage, madame. Remonstrance is useless, unless you wish to submit to arrest."

"One cab," Marchmont told the porters. "Grand Hotel!"

RECOIL

For several days the couple lived as quietly as they knew how, taking their meals in their suite, going out only upon rare occasions. Outwardly, they were upon the best of terms; in reality, they lived as strangers and each avoided the other. To the woman it was a hideous experience. Knowledge that she was watched and that her wrong-doing had been made public weighed her down with an unaccustomed sense of shame and rendered her unbearably self-conscious. It came as a disagreeable surprise, moreover, to realize not only that Larry had never loved her, but also that she was powerless to interest him. It bitterly humiliates any woman to learn that she is bankrupt of sex appeal. Had Larry shown a defiant willingness to face the situation, for her sake, that would have brought some relief, but she was denied even that slender satisfaction. Not that she craved his love; the very fascinations he possessed aroused her deepest contempt now that she knew the uses he had put them to. No, she saw him exactly as Sothern had painted him and she had not the faintest desire to patch up anything from the wreck of their affair. Escape was all she thought about.

One day she directed the carriage man at the Grand to call a motor, and in this she drove to the Galeries Lafayette. She left the cab waiting at the main entrance, took the lift to the third floor, hurried

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downstairs, and slipped out a side entrance. She repeated the maneuver at another store, then hailed a horse-drawn cab and was driven by devious routes to an obscure *pension*. She rented a room and locked herself in. For the first time since leaving Nice she breathed freely.

About six o'clock a discreet knock brought her to the door, there to be greeted by the very French officer who had met her and Larry at the station.

"Monsieur will be waiting dinner," the man said, politely. He stood aside while Norma, with stony face and numb, shaking fingers, put on her hat and descended the stairs.

Back in her bedroom at the Grand, she flung herself upon her bed, sobbing.

At dinner, Marchmont noted her reddened, swollen eyes and exclaimed, irritably: "So, you've started sniveling! My God! how I hate a crying Jane!"

Listlessly she told him what had happened to her. She was surprised at the reaction her words provoked.

"Tried to run out on me, eh? Say, what's wrong with me? I'm a pretty good looker—anyhow, I've got it on Kent for beauty—and I know a lot of women that wouldn't break a leg getting away from me." Tommy McClure, be it said, spoke not with the elegance of Laurence Regan Marchmont.

RECOIL

"If I were you I wouldn't compare myself with Gordon Kent," she told him.

"Why not?" he demanded. "Why not? Beginning to see him in a new light, I suppose; beginning to realize his sterling virtues; getting stuck on him, now it's too late. Is that it?" He laughed unpleasantly. "The big boob! Say, he's a joke. 'Make 'em live together all their rotten lives.' Bah! I can leave those bulls flat any minute."

"Why don't you do it?" eagerly queried Norma.

Marchmont regarded her curiously; his tone had changed when he said: "Perhaps I don't want to. Is there anything strange about that? Maybe I'd rather stay. Just because a fellow has made some mistakes, does that prove he's all bad? You've made a few yourself, according to Sothern."

"He lied! I didn't divorce Jim Selbee, but—the other things he implied were lies. I've been a fool——"

"Same here. Let it go at that. I'm a pretty good scout. I wouldn't make a bad husband."

Norma stared incredulously at the speaker. This was a new Larry. "I'm afraid it's useless to discuss that," she told him.

"Maybe so. But think it over. And—don't mind what I said just now. Maybe I'm jealous. A little kiss wouldn't hurt——"

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Norma shook her head positively and Marchmont shrugged.

In the seclusion of her own chamber, Norma pondered this new situation. Suppose Larry loved her, after all. What then? She had made a complete fiasco of her own life and she had no doubt that Kent would see his vengeance through; but love is a redeemer. If Larry were sincere she might get him to run straight and thus salvage something out of this wreck. That would be worth trying. What was more, it would balk Kent's outrageous scheme of revenge, rob him of his satisfaction. Oddly enough, neither prospect thrilled her in the least.

For the next few days Marchmont really outdid himself. He was genial, tender, solicitous, his amiable qualities were at their best, and the woman reluctantly resigned herself to the inevitable. She tried to like him. She tried to believe that he had shown her the way out.

Larry had several friends in Paris, among the number being a licensed guide, one of those curious persons whose business it is to show the night life of the city to visitors, and the two spent considerable time together. One evening at dinner he told Norma that he intended to take in the sights for a change. She made no objection to his going out, for she was still wrestling with her problem and the prospect of an evening alone with her thoughts was agreeable.

RECOIL

While she lingered over her sweet, he went into his room and changed into evening dress. He emerged finally, spotless, immaculate, his high hat tilted slightly, his overcoat upon his arm, and Norma admitted grudgingly that he presented a handsome picture. She did not know that beneath the careless folds of that topcoat, nestling snugly within the crook of his arm, was her jewel case.

Larry and his guide drove to the Casino de Paris, where they enjoyed the varieties for a half hour, then they strolled back to the stage entrance, through the dressing-room corridor, and out into an alley, where a closed car was waiting. Leaping into this, they were whisked down crooked passages, through one-way streets against the traffic, along the Boulevard, across the Place de la Concorde, out the Champs Élysées and into the Bois. At a deserted spot in the park Marchmont alighted.

"There's a bag in the other car," his accomplice told him, "and you can change on the way."

Larry nodded. The car rolled on. Soon another automobile approached, slowed down, and the waiting man swung himself upon the running board.

Dawn was breaking through a damp Channel fog when Marchmont boarded the boat at Calais. At Dover he lost himself in the disembarking crowd. Two days later he mingled unobtrusively with another throng, this time on the Southampton docks.

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He had a few moments of apprehension and he did not breathe freely until he was up the gangplank of the *Orizaba* and safely inside his stateroom. Then he grinned broadly and lit a cigarette.

So! Live together, eh? Run straight! Sothern must think him a fine fool. There was quite a fortune in those jewels.

It was perhaps five minutes of sailing time when the rattle of a key in his door lock interrupted Marchmont's complacent meditations. Evidently some room steward had made a mistake. He opened the door to explain, but explanations failed him. A tall stranger in a suit of tweeds was facing him. He carried a familiar-looking pigskin bag and behind him was a heavily veiled woman in a rich traveling dress. It was Norma. Larry's jaw fell open; so did the door.

"Here you are, Miss Oakley," the man announced, cheerily, "and time to spare." He stood aside to let his companion enter the stateroom. To Marchmont he explained, succinctly: "I'm from Scotland Yard. We've cabled Sothern's men to pick you up on the dock in New York. I may say we're jolly well pleased to pass you along, McClure. And take a bit of advice—don't return."

"Damn their hearts!" Marchmont cried, furiously, when the door had closed.

"Why rave?" Norma wearily inquired. "They've

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got us. We're branded. By the way, you may as well return the jewels to me, for that officer said if you ever tried to pawn them, or any part of them, either here or in the States, they'd spring the trap." Again the man cursed, more violently, whereupon his traveling companion's lip curled. "Poor 'Taxi Tommy'!" she mocked. "They won't even let him work at his old trade."

One morning, perhaps six months later, Norma Selbee called at Gordon Kent's New York home. It was not an easy thing to do; desperation alone drove her to it. She had lived only a few days in this apartment; oddly enough, however, she still thought of it as home, and when she was shown in she gazed about her with emotions hard to analyze. She was afraid to meet Kent, and during the time she waited for him she struggled against a terrible faintness. Fiercely she bit her numb lips and drove her nails into the palms of her hands.

When he came into the room she uttered a faint cry of distress, for he had aged. He had lived his forty years in less time even than Sothern had deemed possible. He looked ill; he stared bleakly at his caller; his voice was cold when he began:

"Needless to say I am surprised to see you." He waited for her to speak.

She had come with her speech prepared and she began it finally, but faltered; her throat swelled;

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she began to shake uncontrollably. He watched her with no visible trace of compassion.

"I—suppose you know—everything that has happened," she managed to say.

He nodded.

"Haven't I—we—haven't we paid enough?"

He shook his head.

She broke out hysterically at this denial, her voice rose, she wrung her hands. "I'll go mad if it keeps up. I'll—kill him or he'll kill me. It's God's truth!"

"Am I to infer that your life with—my successor is not altogether happy?"

"Don't mock at me," the woman moaned. "You know—your daily reports must show——"

"No doubt Mr. McClure—or do you call him Marchmont? No doubt he sent you here to voice his own as well as your dissatisfaction with our arrangement?"

"He didn't send me. We never speak—except to quarrel. We've lived as strangers ever since that awful morning in Nice. That's the terrible part—for me, a woman. Living in the same rooms with a man like that! My God! if you knew him!"

"I have no desire to make his better acquaintance."

"He won't go straight. I've tried to make him, but—it's no use. I did you a great injury, Mr. Kent.

RECOIL

People do things sometimes without thinking. That has always been my trouble—not thinking. I've thought a great deal since—then. I've realized that nothing I can do will right matters, but—I was willing to try. I thought it might help to square the account if I took my medicine without complaint and—and made something out of him.”

“Admirable purpose! I commend your lofty thought.”

Again the woman protested, hoarsely: “Don't jeer at me. I was honest about it, and I haven't always been honest, even with myself. He made me think it was possible. Then he stole my jewels.”

Kent smiled. “Yes. There was a certain sardonic humor about that. You have been pawning those jewels, I understand.”

“What devil prompted you to take such a revenge? Do you know what it means to live with some one you loathe? It's like being handcuffed to a person with a horrible disease. I'm—a woman, Mr. Kent. I can't—stand it.” The speaker's voice broke. “Put me in a cell. Put me some place in the dark, only get me away from *him*. It's outrageous. I'll pay my share—I don't want to dodge my debt—but no prison, no punishment could be half so hideous as—what I'm going through.”

“Has he arrived at a similar frame of mind?”

“I don't know. Probably. He seldom comes near

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me except to demand money. I've tried to refuse, but—he threatened to beat me.”

“That, of course, I shall not permit. If ever he raises a hand to you, we'll take him within an hour. You may tell him so.”

“Let me go! Let me out!” Norma panted. “Don't make me envy the women on the streets.”

“And why not?” Kent demanded, fiercely. “Are you any better than they?”

“I don't know. Everything is all crooked. It seems to me as if I'd been groping all my life—in the dark. Perhaps I'm no better than they, only different. What Mr. Sothern said about playing at love is probably true, but the men I knew played at love, too, and all of them were cheats, except you. Let me go. Call off your men.”

“And why? Just because you're learning what it is to pay a debt?”

“No. It's not because of that.” The woman spoke apathetically. “It's because I shall do something—dreadful if this keeps up. I've tried running away, time after time, and so has March—so has *he*. We've given that up. But those men are always lurking around—always! The same ones. The same faces. In the street, in the stores, in the theaters. I see them in my dreams, especially the dark one with the scar. I feel eyes on me even when I'm alone and locked in my room. And

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March—*he* does, too. I've heard him shout, from his room, and throw things at the wall, and curse. They never speak, they're never looking, and yet they see everything. I think we're going crazy. That's what I came to see you about. He'll probably kill me some day and go to the electric chair, just to escape."

"Not while your jewelry lasts." Kent rose. The interview had terminated. "My experiment works. It is expensive, but it's amusing and I get little amusement these days. Thank you for calling."

He watched her as she moved out of the room, and for a long time after he heard the outer door close he stood motionless, staring ahead of him with fixed, unseeing eyes. If, indeed, his vengeance brought him joy, he showed none of it, for his face was gray with suffering, and when finally he moved it was as a feeble, tired old man.

Kent telephoned his friend Sothern one day to inquire: "What's this about Norma going to work? What does it mean?"

"It simply means that she can't stand the situation any longer."

"You're sure the money isn't gone?"

"Quite sure. We've traced every piece of jewelry she has pledged. No, she's breaking down. She tried the Fifth Avenue fashion shops, and even the department stores, then she got a job in this Newark

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stock company. I'm sorry for her, Gordon. It must be hell."

There was a pause. "Anything new about—the man?"

"Nothing except that he's taken to dope. He's hitting it pretty hard. Nerves gone. He's thoroughly licked. He hasn't even attempted a getaway since we nailed him the last time. He's as easy to find as a bell sheep. But he's getting mighty jumpy—that's the drugs, of course. Any further instructions?"

"None. Don't let your men get careless, that's all."

What Norma had said about her and Marchmont's life together was quite true. Ever since that dismal hour when the *Orizaba* sailed from Southampton the two had regarded themselves as prisoners locked for life into the same cell and each was hateful to the other. They avoided each other—as much as two people chained wrist to wrist can avoid each other—and their mutual loathing steadily grew. Between them was not even that brotherhood of misery that exists between two cell mates. That day in Southampton Marchmont had profanely voiced his detestation of his companion, and scarcely a day had passed since then without his making that detestation patent. Sometimes it was no more than a sneer in passing that he gave her; at other times

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he took a malevolent pleasure in openly torturing her. He discovered that she could not abide the sound of Gordon Kent's name upon his lips, so he talked about the mining man, jeered at him, tormented her with accusations of love. The sight of her white face, her contemptuous lips, goaded him to fury, and more than once when she fled to her room, locked herself in, and buried her head in her pillows, he stood outside her door, rocking with rage and shouting obscene taunts at her. It roused him to a frenzy, also, to realize that he dared not touch her, for in his foaming passions he would have gladly torn her flesh and taken solace for his monstrous fury from her screams. His fingers itched for her, but he had been warned against that, and Sothern had spoken truly, he was licked. Fear had him. In his dreams he saw those faces, felt a hand upon his shoulder, heard a voice bidding him come.

It was almost equally infuriating to realize that he was dependent upon Norma's bounty, but he was in mortal terror of trying his old tricks—those men again—and honest work had never brought him the luxury he craved. She never gave him money that he did not curse the name of the man from whom it really came. Of course the gems went, one by one, but Norma had come to regard them in a new light, for they reminded her of Gordon Kent and

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his boyish delight in giving, and she wept over them a good deal.

Never had a woman been more lonely than she, for her position made friends impossible, and shame reddened her cheeks even when strangers looked at her. For relief she turned to work.

At first she could not bear to think of going back on the stage where people would see her and perhaps learn who and what she was, but Newark was not New York and that stock company was obscure.

She was almost happy during the first few weeks of her engagement, in spite of the fact that she knew she was shadowed back and forth. The work was exhausting, but it took her out of her cell. What was more, she felt some faint stirrings of self-respect within her breast. She held up her head.

Then one Monday morning an amazing thing occurred. The company had reported for rehearsal; Norma was introduced to the new character man and met—Jim Selbee.

Selbee was quite as surprised as she.

"Norma!" he exclaimed.

"Jim!" She raised a hand before her face as if to ward off a blow. Sick, dizzy, she walked out of the lights into the shadows of the wings.

Selbee followed her, saying:

"This *is* luck. I've been looking everywhere for you."

RECOIL

"Why?"

"'Why'? I guess you can imagine. I'm your husband."

Even in the gloom it could be seen that time had not dealt kindly with Jim. He was fatter than formerly, he was soft and white, and about him clung the depressing suggestion of failure. His clothes were wrinkled and baggy.

"Say, what are you doing in a dump like this?" he inquired. "What's become of your Peruvian prince? I expected to flag you on the Avenue in your Rolls-Royce."

"And collect your share, eh?"

"Never mind that tone."

"Well, your trip East was useless. I— He left me."

"The devil he did!" Selbee was dismayed.

Norma explained, faintly. "When I heard you were alive, why——"

"Can that! You knew I was alive. Where did I ever die? So he left you! Well, I assume he provided well for you. They say he's got a ton of money."

"He gave me nothing."

"What? You let him—? My God! what a fool! I guess it's time you had a manager. But I'll make him pay. There's a big story in it—famous financier

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and actor's wife. These rich guys can't stand publicity."

"No, no!" gasped the woman. "You shan't—I won't let you." She calmed herself with an effort and lied desperately: "He's gone. He's in Europe—no, South America."

"He'll come back. We'll reach him somehow. Where are you living, Norma?"

"Over there—New York."

"Things have gone bad with me. I'll bring my stuff over and we'll dope out a scheme to shake this bird——"

"Listen, Jim. I wouldn't live with you if— I'd kill myself first."

"Oh, *would* you?"

She nodded positively; her face was chalk white. "You tried to make me do this very thing in Frisco. That's why I left you."

"Yeah? Well, the situation is different now. You're a bigamist. I'm the injured husband and the law's on my side. I guess I'll handle this thing about the way I——"

Selbee was called, at the moment, so he said, hurriedly: "I'll see you after rehearsal and we'll talk this thing out. I tell you, Norma, there's a fortune in it."

When, a short time later, Miss Selbee was called, she did not respond and inquiry developed the fact

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that she had suddenly been taken ill and had hurried out of the theater. When she did not return, the rehearsal was postponed.

The new character man was gravely concerned at the news, for he and Miss Selbee were related. He volunteered to go and render what assistance he could, and at the box office he was given Norma's address. He returned to his lodgings, packed his things, and took the Tube to New York, but he was in a poisonous humor. Run out on him again, would she? He guessed not. She had always been obdurate. There was just one way to treat a contrary woman—give her a good beating.

Norma fled as if pursued, fled by taxi across town to the Subway, and, once in Manhattan, again by taxi to Gordon Kent's apartment. Here was a situation! Jim Selbee would stop at nothing to get money, and if he discovered Marchmont—what then? At thought of the treatment Jim's story would get in the newspapers she fell into a panic. But she had a plan and it would work, she felt sure, if Kent would agree to it and if there were time to put it through.

But Kent was not in and his servants did not know when he would return. Norma tried frantically to locate him by telephone, but failed, so she waited. An hour passed; two hours.

When he did come she met him as he stepped

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into his reception hall. Her hysteria had passed and she had herself well in hand. She told him briefly why she had come.

"Um-m. Blackmail, you say?"

"It's Selbee's old game. That's why I left him." Kent looked at her sharply and she flushed. "He wants money and he'll go to any length to get it. He's that kind."

"Of course I won't give him a cent."

"Of course. That's why I'm here. Mr. Sothern can't handle this, but I can."

"How, pray?"

"Call off your men. Let Marchmont go. Set us free. Don't misunderstand me, please: I'm not begging for mercy. Unlock our chains and—I'll go back to Jim."

"*Live* with him?" Kent was frankly astonished.

Norma nodded. "I can manage him. It's the only way out."

"Do you want to go back to him?"

"You know I don't. If anything, it will be worse than—the way I'm living now. But it will be better than scandal for you. He'll drink as long as the money lasts, but if he takes me back that will stop him from making trouble. The law says something like that, I'm sure. You must act quickly, however."

RECOIL

Kent eyed the speaker queerly. "I don't understand you," he confessed.

When Norma answered him, it was with more emotion than she had shown heretofore. "I was to blame. You've suffered enough without being publicly humiliated. Such things last. They're not easily lived down. You'd be ruined. I'd like to avoid that." She waited for him to say something, then inquired, "Will you—set me free?"

"Yes! Of course!" He came to with a start. "It's out of my hands. It is now Selbee's affair. Perhaps I can do something about him——"

She was at the door, but she shook her head. "You don't know him."

She was gone; he could hear her feet flying down the hall. Again he stood as she had left him, motionless, frozen, as if with her going had gone his power of movement.

He was still standing there ten, perhaps fifteen, minutes later when the bell rang. Thinking that she had returned, he opened the door to discover one of Sothern's operatives outside.

The man began hurriedly: "I've got some news for you. There's been a killing up yonder, at the hotel."

Kent shrank as if he had been struck; his face blanched. "My God! Not—not—Norma?"

"No. Marchmont shot Jim Selbee."

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The mining man groped for support; he drew a deep, slow breath of relief. "How—did it happen?" he managed to inquire.

"We've got the story pretty straight, I think. Selbee, it seems, came there looking for his wife, and found Marchmont. He ordered him out—a bell boy overheard him cursing Marchmont and telling him to get out—and of course Marchmont refused: Some situation for him, wasn't it? Couldn't go and couldn't stay. They had a row. Marchmont was full of hop and—shot him.

"We got in with the hotel employees—broke the door down. They'd been fighting all over the place, but the woman wasn't there."

"She was here," said Kent. "They can't link her up with it."

"Marchmont started a self-defence talk till he saw us—Allen was with me—then he went clear off his nut and began to shout: 'I did it. I did it. Now, damn you, follow me up the river, if you can!' He kept that up till the officers got there, and on the way to the station he kept yelling and cursing at Allen and me and begging them to 'give him the works,' 'throw the book at him.' You'd think we made him do it."

"You did."

'Eh?'

"Go on."

RECOIL

"That's about all. He's raving like a madman—steaming with 'hop,' I suppose. They've got him in a straight jacket, but he's getting worse."

"Thank you for letting me know. Your job is over, now. It's up to Sothern to handle the newspapers."

But the newspapers could not be "handled." The story back of the killing of Jim Selbee was uncovered, in spite of the fact that the ravings of his slayer were almost unintelligible. Tommy McClure, alias Marchmont, had suffered a mental breakdown, in all probability permanent, according to the doctors, and his deed had been that of a maniac, nevertheless enough was made out of his gabblings to set inquiry afoot among his friends, and they gave the story form.

Gordon Kent had cheated the newspapers out of a story once before; they followed this one hungrily. Neither money nor influence availed to check them, and he awoke one morning to find his name on the front page. The story was garbled, of course; it was inaccurate and highly colored, but it told of the impetuous wooing and the hurried wedding, the wife's elopement with the audacious Marchmont, son of an Irish earl; the outraged husband's scheme of revenge made possible at the last moment by the discovery that Jim Selbee was alive. Kent was pictured as a mysterious man of unlimited wealth and

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power, who lived in Babylonian splendor and whose extravagances, whose eccentricities, were the sensation of New York. Here the reporters let their imaginations run wild and they invented episodes, adventures, wholly outrageous. But most of their writings were descriptive of Kent's monstrous hatred and his Machiavellian vengeance against the devoted lovers, a vengeance that had driven Marchmont to murder and wrecked his mind.

It was a saffron triumph of news gathering and it caught on. It was rewritten from various angles. It all but killed Norma Selbee.

Kent, too, was crushed. He was a sensitive man. Notoriety was like the touch of flame, so he locked himself in his apartment and nobody saw him, nobody spoke with him.

He knew himself now to be a marked man, an object of curiosity if not of derision, and he brooded over that fact. For the first time he realized how dangerous it may be for a man to act as judge in his own cause. He had dug a pit and his own feet had fallen into it; the thorns which he reaped were of the tree he had planted. Most of all, however, he thought of the suffering he had caused Norma.

She was surprised one night, several weeks after the death of Selbee, when he sent his car for her. It was with uncertain hands that she dressed herself; she was trembling when she entered his home.

RECOIL

"I didn't tell them," she faltered, when they met. "They tried every way to make me talk, but—I never mentioned your name."

"I know. Sothern told me. But—those wolves! There's no avoiding them. I sent for you to—apologize. It's a poor word. I'd like to make amends for the misery I've brought you, if there's any way."

Norma shook her head; her face was distressed. "That isn't necessary. The debt is on my side."

"Those newspapers have made it impossible for me to live here any longer. They've run me out of my own country—the country I love. I'm going back."

"Back?"

"To South America. It's the only place left."

Norma knew how bitterly he must hate this necessity. Compassion for him and relief at the fact that he held her blameless for this last misfortune brought a film of tears to her eyes. She was very tired; her nerves had been stretched to the breaking point; it was a relief to give way. Meanwhile, he talked on.

"I worked twenty years, like a galley slave, with one thought in my mind—to come back to my own people and be one of them. I was tired. I wanted to play. I didn't intend to hurt anybody and I was willing to pay double for any happiness I could

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find. You don't know what it's like to choke up when you see your own flag and to say: 'That's mine. Some day I'll go home.' I can't even do that any more. And all from wanting to play—to catch up on the joys I'd missed. It's kind of—heart-breaking. But there—! Don't cry," he said gently. "It was coming to me. It's a light punishment, I dare say, for the sin I committed. You see, I never realized how much of a woman you are until—until too late." After a while, he resumed, meditatively: "There's an old Spanish house, I know, with a sunny patio and a trickling fountain. It is set way up above a Spanish city with high cathedral towers and it looks west out over the ocean. The mountains behind are steep and bare, but the canyons are full of color. There are orange trees outside the windows of the house and hibiscus trees with big red blossoms, and fragrant night-blooming shrubs with queer names. It's very quiet there. Nothing ever happens. Ships pass in and out, but there's nothing to do except read and sleep and think and look at the ocean and play with the little brown Spanish kids. You wouldn't like it."

Norma wiped her eyes and smiled forlornly.

"Well, I'm going back there. I'm going to drop out—forget that I'm an American, forget that I ever lived in a place called New York. Before I go,

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there's something I wish you to have. It's in your room. You know the way——”

“Thank you—no,” she gasped. “I'd rather not—go in.”

“I wish you would.”

Without further protest, she rose and crossed the hall into the chamber he had shown her to that first night, and there on the dressing table, carefully laid out, each piece nestling in its case, were the jewels she had parted with. She uttered a faint cry, for the sight of them was like a bayonet thrust. So he had redeemed them, each and every one, and now gave them back to her. This was his payment. He had meant it as a kindness, no doubt, but— She sank to the padded bench and bowed her head in her arms.

Kent spoke from the door: “Your clothes, your furs, and all your pretty things are in the closets. I hung them there myself and—I've cared for them with my own hands. I suppose they're out of style, but they're very dear to me and they look very beautiful.”

“O my God!” sobbed the woman.

“It's quiet in that drowsy old Spanish house. But don't you think we've had enough excitement?”

Norma ceased weeping; she looked up with a dawning incredulity in her eyes.

He nodded at her unspoken question and smiled

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gravely. "Yes, dear—always—every hour! Only I couldn't believe you cared for me." He came and stood close beside her and she laid her wet face against his sleeve. "There, there! We still have the future and it begins to-morrow morning at eleven, when our ship sails. We'll be married at ten."

THE OBVIOUS THING

THE OBVIOUS THING

I

IT was four o'clock on a sultry afternoon, and the office of the Lockport *Daily and Weekly Argus* was athrob with life. The rattle of the hand press shook the loose window frames of the combined editorial and press rooms; over all was an atmosphere of excitement and expectancy. With regard to the size of Lockport as a town, and the dignity of the *Argus* as a paper, perhaps the fact that Major Parker, the editor and publisher, referred to himself as "we," and to his office as "the sanctum," explains all that is necessary. Publication hour, always an occasion of activity, was to-day something more than that, for it marked an epoch in the life of the community, and headlines in the heaviest type the *Argus* office afforded proclaimed the following:

LOCKPORT CAPTURES THE PHŒNIX FACTORY

Beneath that leader were the exciting details of how the Chamber of Commerce had prevailed upon the "gigantic Phœnix Shirtwaist Factory, employing

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more than one hundred hands, to locate in Lockport." This supreme achievement, according to the still damp copy, marked "the beginning of a great commercial uplift, destined to change our fair city from a quiet, easy-going agricultural center into a palpitating hive of industry whose stacks and chimneys will pierce the sky and punctuate the horizon."

Joey Dunn, local editor, city editor, society editor, dramatic editor, and entire reportorial staff of the *Argus*, re-read that last sentence with satisfaction. In him was more than mere pride of authorship, for he had made this whole thing possible. It was he who had called Major Parker's attention to an item in one of the exchanges stating that the shirtwaist factory at Plymouth was looking for a new site, and that germ it was, transplanted by Major Parker, which had inoculated the Chamber of Commerce with a sudden feverish aggressiveness and resulted in an offer to the shirtwaist factory of land and a building in Lockport.

Major Parker looked up from his perusal of the *Argus*, in his eyes the moist, proud intensity of a general reviewing his heroic troops after a successful battle.

"Now, Joey," said he, "go up the street and get some interviews for the last page to-morrow. Go to the Bank, the Post Office, the Business College, and Judge Arnold's."

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Young Mr. Dunn agreed cheerfully. "I'll get the interviews while the excitement is at white heat, and I'll write the story of the ice house fire later. I'm thinking out an idea for the fire story—works in great with the Phoenix Factory, too. Ice-house blaze lights the beacon of Lockport's coming fame and glory—shirtwaist factory rises Phoenix-like from the ashes. Phoenix! Fire! Good, isn't it?"

"Splendid!" agreed Major Parker. "I shall use it myself, editorially. Now run along."

Joey Dunn was a spindling youth, at that embarrassing age when coat sleeves and trousers legs are always too short. He was energetic, in an alert, loose-jointed way, and he possessed the restless industry of a limber, half-grown setter dog. Joey had not been born to journalism; in fact, he had sprung from stock far removed from literary endeavors. He lived with an aunt out near the fair grounds, and had been reared with the woolen-mill crowd, hence he had got away to a bad start both in a business way and socially. Any small town boy will understand what industry and perseverance it had required to become the *Argus* Eye, all-seeing, all-observing, even though the salary was only four dollars per week, with commissions on local ads and job printing. But Joey was not content with one calling. His was an ambitious nature, and he had plans. Mornings, he studied a course in efficiency

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engineering at Helm's Business College; evenings he was assistant shipping clerk at the Lockport Carriage Works, and once a week he did a two column news letter for the Madison City *Dispatch*, for which he was reimbursed in the amount of seventy-five cents.

Literary work had gained Mr. Dunn some social recognition, to be sure, but one's past dies hard in towns like Lockport and among the select Maple Avenue clique, which included the oldest families, he still remained a member of the woolen-mill crowd. This was an unbearable state of affairs, for Joey had met "the one woman" and, unfortunately, she belonged within the most exclusive inner circle of that very set. In moments of pessimism he told himself that it was just his luck to fall in love with Maggie Knapp, of all girls—the pride and the belle of Lockport, daughter of the president of the First National Bank, the Chamber of Commerce, and the County Fair Association, and owner of the one residence in the city built by a Chicago architect.

But doubts and indecisions were foreign to Mr. Dunn, and, being fully conscious of his handicap, he had long since embarked upon a secret enterprise designed solely to pave his way to Maple Avenue and bridge the social chasm yawning 'twixt the Fifth Ward and the Hill. Joey was—whisper—author of the "Maude" letters in the *Weekly Argus*, a stinging,

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satirical review of Lockport's intimate social doings, written in the best style of George Bernard Shaw, but with more punch, and supposedly emanating from one of the season's débutantes.

For doing the "Maude" letters Joey received no direct financial return—he had not expected it—but his reward was greater than riches. Not long before this story opens he had seen fit to convey an unmistakable hint as to the identity of the mysterious "Maude," and Lockport society, like society anywhere else, had caressed the hand that smote it. Joey had told Mrs. Parker, first extracting from her a sacred pledge of secrecy, and of course Mrs. Parker had told her most intimate friend, Mrs. Greenman. Mrs. Greenman had imparted the secret to Mrs. Hollinger, and Mrs. Hollinger had told the ladies of "The Eastern Star," and now, although Lockport's exclusive set never openly discussed the matter, nevertheless it recognized Joey Dunn as the composer of those poison-pen paragraphs and—it had begun to take him in.

Nor was that the extent of his triumph. Respect for Joey's hidden power, his fearless independent criticism, had also brought him membership in the Crève-Cœur Club, an aggregation of Lockport's leading young men, than which there was no higher social goal. Upon this foundation he had begun to build.

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In such condition, then, were the fortunes of our hero—if the author of the “Maude” letters may be so considered—on the afternoon that he interviewed Mr. Knapp, Maggie’s father. Mr. Knapp was not averse to an interview—nobody in Lockport ever was—so Joey jotted down his bromidic platitudes with reportorial care. As he was leaving the bank he met Maggie entering, and stopped her to say:

“Well, this is a great day for Lockport, isn’t it?”

Miss Knapp appeared to have as little interest in the welfare of her town as in that of Joey Dunn, for she assumed his remark to apply to the weather. She agreed, politely, that it was indeed a fine day, but seasonable. With that vague, impersonal smile of the daughter of the leading citizen she was about to pass on, when Joey inquired:

“Why, haven’t you heard the big news?”

Miss Knapp had not, but right there she did. Joey gave it to her in all its breathless detail. Even so her being did not throb as a harp; capture of the giant Phoenix Shirtwaist Factory thrilled her to about the same extent as the capture of a muskrat in Pike Lake, and she seemed to regard the process as very similar, the labor entailed as about the same. Not until Joey abandoned the subject and mentioned Crève-Cœur night did Maggie’s interest become more than perfunctory.

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"Now that I'm secretary, we're going to have better music," Joey told her.

"How splendid!" Miss Knapp genuinely brightened.

"We've hired Nussbaum Brothers' full orchestra—six pieces. They'll play until the last Madison trolley leaves."

"I don't know what our set would do without the dear old Crève-Cœur, do you?"

It was Joey's turn to brighten. Our set! Soundlessly he repeated the magic words; intoxication mounted to his brain. He had arrived. Joey lost no time in profiting by his arrival.

Inasmuch as he carried credentials identifying him as the Lockport representative of the New York *Dramatic Mirror*, and was thus entitled to a pair of seats at Hull's Opera House whenever a theatrical attraction visited the town, he now took the tide at its full and with reckless haste invited Maggie to attend with him a performance of "East Lynne" as rendered by the Tannehill Répertoire Company on the following Friday night. He recommended the play highly. Would Miss Knapp do him the honor—? A bite of supper afterward at the Baltimore Oyster House—?

Although Maggie's smile altered not in its outward aspect; although her large, brown, earnest eyes remained fixed upon his; although her voice

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continued as sweet and as friendly as before—nevertheless, a psychological metamorphosis occurred within her. Her soul hardened, turned to adamant, and Joey knew that he had received her regrets even before she voiced them and passed into the bank, still smiling in that radiant yet forbidding belle-of-the-village way.

Full well Joey knew that no previous invitation stood in her way; full well he realized that “our set” had been merely a polite figure of speech. Miss Knapp tolerated him, yes, but no more than that, and the certainty was like gall.

Joey vowed that he would not, could not, remain upon the fringe of Lockport’s four hundred. His nature revolted at compromise. Under his breath he swore to bring this proud beauty to his feet, then, absent-mindedly, he pulled down his coat sleeves to cover the immodest knobs of his wrist joints and, glowing with bitter resentment, set out to complete his round of interviews.

Joey went without his dinner that night to finish the ice-house-fire story, then he hurried to the O. K. Drug Store to attend a business meeting of the Crève-Cœur Club. The members were well along with the details of the next reception when he arrived. Promptly upon his entrance he sprang the coup which he had been contemplating ever since Maggie Knapp’s refusal that afternoon.

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"Boys," he began, "we're not handling our invitations right. Some of the girls get half a dozen bids, and others don't get any until the rush is over. Then they know they're second choice, and of course they're sore."

"That's natural. Some of them are more popular than others," declared Welch Travis, president of the Crève-Cœur Club.

Duncan Leadbetter agreed with this. "Sure!" he exclaimed. "A girl is lucky to get an invite at all. We should worry if they get sore."

Joey shook his head. "In my position"—he paused significantly—"I hear things that you fellows don't. It's the old folks! Suppose some of the lodge members should object to our using the Assembly Room? Where would we get another hall? The Crève-Cœur is exclusive, and its receptions have a lot of *éclat*. Suppose, for instance, we had to rent Schaeffer's Hall? Where would our "class" be? Take it from me, we're facing a crisis in the affairs of this organization."

"What are we going to do about it?" Welch inquired.

Joey answered with all the conviction he could muster. "There's only one fair way, and that is to pick out the names of twenty girls, one for each of us, then draw lots. Every girl gets one invitation and no more, and every fellow gets a fair chance."

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This innovation was too startling for immediate acceptance, especially by an organization of such dignity as the Crève-Cœur; the club's president raised his voice in protest, but his words were interrupted by the entrance of a customer who wanted some cream of tartar, sulphur, and molasses. While Mr. Travis was engaged in compounding this odious mixture the discussion at the cigar counter went on, and by the time he returned a majority had been won over to Joey Dunn's views. It was decided to hold a drawing then and there, and the secretary retired to prepare the slips, fold them, and place them in a hat.

Any doubt whatsoever as to which member of the Crève-Cœur fell the slip containing Maggie Knapp's name would be a reflection upon the sincerity of Joey Dunn's interest in her.

On the following morning Miss Knapp was both delighted and flattered at Joey's telephone invitation to the dance, but she so regretted having already accepted another. Wasn't it unfortunate? However, she hoped he wouldn't punish her by entirely overlooking her at the ball. Joey assured her that he wouldn't; then he hung up with a sardonic grin.

Were this story written in motion-picture "continuity" form there would now come a "fade-out" to signify a lapse of time, then a "fade-in," followed by the subtitle: "As the days passed and the night

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of the dance approached, with no further invitations, Miss Knapp, the pride and pet of Lockport, found herself in a panic resembling hysteria."

It was during the morning of the day of the dance that Maggie, in much bewilderment, and with no little resentment, telephoned to Joey Dunn at the Business College, and explained with honeyed sweetness that she had made a stupid error. She would be delighted to accept his invitation if it still remained open. Joey's face was alight with supreme satisfaction when he returned to his lesson in "motion study," part of his efficiency engineering course. Efficiency indeed! Well, it struck him that this was it.

Had Miss Knapp better understood Joey's character, she could have relieved herself of many annoyances in the days that followed by allowing him the freedom of seeing her more often. The unattainable is alluring, and Joey's conquering spirit was fired by her opposition. He was not a modest young man; on the contrary, he was extremely popular with himself, and he firmly believed that if Maggie knew him better she would come to share that high regard. Accordingly, he interfered as much and as often as possible with her arrangements.

Meanwhile, needless to say, Miss Knapp's name continued to fall to him at the Crève-Cœur drawings, and between dance nights he called as often as pos-

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sible and stayed as late as he could. He took her to the Thursday-evening band concerts in Court House Square; he invited her to everything from the graduating exercises at the Normal School to the dedication of the Soldiers' Monument at Madison. More often than not his invitations were refused, but the monotony of constant refusal is wearing, and there was a limit even to Miss Knapp's inventive ingenuity. By and large, her unwelcome admirer enjoyed a good deal of her society.

Now do not imagine that Joey's courtship was pursued in any haphazard manner. On the contrary, he had gone too deeply into the study of efficiency methods at Helm's Business College to permit of that, and from the beginning he had had a definite system in mind. Efficiency is nine-tenths "system," anyhow; there is a system for everything, so he had learned. He applied elemental efficiency methods to his wooing, and, having full faith in the subject, he entertained no doubt as to the ultimate outcome. To win Maggie Knapp meant only that he had to "sell" himself to her, and all selling problems involve similar principles, one of which is to show your goods.

Being a born salesman, Joey displayed his slender stock of wares with utmost skill. He considered himself a literary man, therefore he spoke of other Indiana writers like George Ade, Booth Tarkington,

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James Whitcomb Riley, with the easy familiarity of a fellow craftsman. He called them by their first names. Being a dramatic critic, too—practically on the staff of the New York *Dramatic Mirror*—he made free to roast the theater with all the searching cynicism of his calling. But somehow he and Maggie continued to occupy separate ground. His up-to-date slang intrigued her but faintly; her knowledge of the drama remained purely academic; as for literature and music, her tastes were much higher than his. She appreciated only the best. "When I was a Tadpole and You Were a Fish" and Chopin's "Funeral March" were her ideas of art. Joey, alas! was by nature a ragtime devotee; the limerick was his favorite art form.

All great passions, from the time of Anthony and Cleopatra to that of Joey Dunn and Maggie Knapp, have issued in a climax more or less dramatic. The crisis in Joey's life came one evening on the way home from a Crève-Cœur function. It was staged in the musty interior of a hack from the Depot Bus Line. Maggie had been more than usually beautiful that evening, more than usually gracious. Drunk with conquest, therefore, Joey possessed himself of one of her ungloved hands, and holding it in a jiu-jitsu grip, began in this highly original vein:

"I have something important to say to you, Maggie."

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He ignored her futile efforts to free her fingers from his octopus-like grip and ran on with a quaver of intensity, "It means a great deal to me. I must speak."

"Go ahead and speak. I'm not stopping you." Miss Knapp had suddenly become formal. Her abrupt change from tropic warmth to polar frigidity was not without its reaction upon Joey, but it merely added to his recklessness.

"I'm leaving Lockport!"

Now Joey was not leaving Lockport, so far as he knew. This statement was purely inspirational, but, in the language of the *Dramatic Mirror*, his act was dragging and he had to put some pep into it. Moreover, he had somehow lost his grip upon his "system" and, for the moment at least, he had doubts of the efficiency methods taught by Professor Helm. Onward he plunged, explaining mendaciously, "I've been offered a splendid opportunity in Chicago. Will you—will you wait for me?"

There was a moment of strained silence, then, "Wait? Wait for what?" Miss Knapp's voice was very flat.

"Why, wait for me to make a success, so that I can come back and——"

Joey's lady of dreams freed her hand with a treacherous jerk, then spoke with the first genuine feeling she had ever displayed toward him.

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"Don't be silly!" she cried, with a sharpness akin to anger. "I haven't the faintest idea what you're driving at, and I don't want to know."

Thus ended Joey's great moment. The rest of the ride was made in silence. When he left Maggie at her door he dismissed the hack as usual—thus saving twenty-five cents—then walked home alone with his sorrow. It was plain to him now that he had overplayed his hand, and his pride writhed. To-morrow was the weekly meeting of the Entre Nous Society, and full well he knew that by night it would be all over town that he had made love to Maggie Knapp and had been put in his place. Vague memories of caustic "Maude" letters rose to plague him. Resentment he knew lingered in the minds of those who had quivered at his poisoned shafts; they would delight in making him ridiculous.

He had told Maggie he was going to Chicago. Well, he could see nothing left now but to do so. Why not swallow his grief in heroic dignity, go to the City, make a fortune, and return to Lockport, just to show her what a hideous mistake she had made? Joey pondered this thought briefly, then raising his thin face to the empty night sky, he announced his decision in a shaky voice, "The die is cast!"

Nobody ever had much trouble in leaving Lockport; it was not that kind of a town. The next day Joey drew his savings account and secured letters

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of recommendation from Major Parker of the *Argus*, Mayor Phillips, President Knapp of the First National, Cashier Pegland of the Union Trust Company, and Professor Helm of the Business College. The letters made an imposing array. They spoke so highly of Joey's admirable character, of his sobriety, his industry, his talents, his Christian character, that nobody could have read them without experiencing extreme depression and without taking a violent dislike to such a paragon of youthful virtue.

His last view of Lockport, as his train pulled out on the second morning, was of the new Phoenix Shirtwaist Factory which he had helped to "capture."

II

Perhaps the reader anticipates, with natural repugnance, a history of Joey Dunn's heart-breaking struggle to find work, or even a dramatic story of his rapid rise to affluence through a display of latent ability. If so, then this account has failed correctly to sketch the young man's make-up. In the first place, Joey was not the sort to go long without a job. As a matter of fact, no normal young man in these days can very well evade work unless he devotes his entire time to it, and Joey was immoderately, extravagantly normal. To be sure, his letters

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of recommendation were a handicap, but he soon realized that fact and laid them away, and a few days thereafter became engaged as bill clerk in a South Water Street butter-and-egg house at fifteen dollars per week—double the salary he had deserted at Lockport.

Followed long hours of hard work, a dreary procession of North Side boarding houses, all bad and some worse; a social life limited to boarding-house acquaintances and evening chats on boarding-house steps.

Joey did not remain overlong with the butter-and-egg concern. Once he had obtained a superficial familiarity with it, he undertook to install certain of those "systems" he had learned at Helm's Business College, with the result that he was fired.

After that job came one in a department store, another in a paint factory, a fourth in the estimating department of a bridge works, next a position as typist in an addressing agency, another as tabulator in a real-estate office. These were not all. In the next few years Joey changed jobs almost as frequently, and quite as willingly, as he changed boarding houses. At the end of that time there remained the prospect of unlimited numbers of both ahead of him, but precious little else, so far as he could see.

When the smart of his last discharge had eased,

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Joey took stock of himself and realized that it was high time that he did so. Here he was at the advanced age of twenty-four, and with a scant thousand dollars in the bank. This despite the fact that his habits were good, his health better—except for the inevitable ravages of boarding-house hash and underdone beans—and that he was both aggressive and industrious. What then was wrong with him? Why was it that jobs fairly fastened themselves upon him, and that he slipped out of them with the same regularity that a snake slips out of its skin? He was practical, honest, accurate, systematic, and ambitious. He wondered if he was too ambitious. But, no, ambition is a virtue recognized in all copy books. Perhaps he was too systematic. That seemed more likely to be the trouble—he ran naturally to “systems”; in fact, he had one for anything, everything. Now that he thought of it, the moving cause for most of his dismissals seemed to have been that very thing—*viz.*, his ill-considered attempts to better existing methods. His last employer, for instance, had told him, with insulting bluntness, that he was trying to run the shop, whereas said shop had limped along very well before his arrival and would doubtless continue so to do after his departure, which he requested Joey to make simultaneous with the coming pay day.

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Yes, that was it! He was *too* systematic—or else other people were not systematic enough.

Joey did not arrive at this conviction with the directness here set down; it came at the cost of long, thoughtful hours, but the more he analyzed himself the more plainly he seemed to discern the reef upon which he had grounded. The trouble was he had offered suggestions where they were not wanted, and unsolicited advice is always offensive. Joey was not original, but he did have the average talent for clear reasoning, and what is more he had acquired sufficient vision to behold the obvious, unless it happened to be too close to him. Furthermore, having seen it, he had the ability to capitalize it, and in this he showed his nearest approach to genius.

Rarely does the great inventor, the man of untried methods, the startlingly original man, make a great success. More often reward comes to the man who recognizes the obvious thing, takes advantage of it, and makes it work for him. Had Joey spoken aloud he would have said something like this:

"I've been wrong in trying to reform businesses that don't need reforming. Then, too, I *gave* advice. Anything you give away becomes cheap; put a price on it and people may think it is worth something, whether it is or not. I got in Dutch by trying to cure successful concerns, and no doctor gets rich feeding pills to well people."

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Young Mr. Dunn reasoned logically to the next step, and decided that in the future he must reform failures—and be paid for so doing.

By now his experience was wide; beneath that experience lay a solid theoretical bedrock of business principles as taught by Professor Helm. He made up his mind, therefore, to become a doctor to sick business, an industrial engineer, an efficiency expert.

Following this decision, he rented and furnished an office in a downtown elevator building, had his name painted on the door, and put a card in all of the magazines devoted to commercial organization work. His daylight hours he spent on the street cars that ran through the manufacturing districts, and whenever he observed a run-down plant, or a factory that appeared to lack prosperity, he noted the name, then wrote an alluring "personal" letter to the president, signed "Jos. Dunn, Assets Realizations."

Joey got some rises to this bait. He called and talked theories of "motion economy," "efficiency," and the like, but in every instance, when he arrived at a discussion of his retaining fee, interest in his services abruptly ceased. It reminded him of his wooing of Maggie Knapp.

A couple of months of this, and Joey realized that he had a "motion" problem of his own to solve—

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namely, an all-going-out-and-nothing-coming-in motion. It was quite contrary to his and Professor Helm's theories; it seemed to contradict his belief that principles are undying and, correctly applied, must bear results. The time came when Joey's rent bill looked like Belgium's account for damages; nevertheless, he kept a stiff upper lip and maintained implicit faith in himself.

One day he received a note from the Biggs Buggy and Body Company, asking Mr. Dunn to call at his earliest convenience. Mr. Dunn's earliest convenience was at once, or even sooner, but, appreciating the psychology of leisurely action, he waited—long enough for his heartbeats to cease choking him—before raising Mr. Biggs himself by phone.

"Mr. Dunn speaking," he began, rapidly. "I have your letter in my morning mail, but I'm just finishing an important report for an Eastern client. Would to-morrow do?"

He heard a grunt. "Oh, sure! Next week—any time, I guess. There is really no——"

"Very well," Joey interrupted. "To-morrow at ten."

Nine thirty found the youthful expert in assets realization in the vicinity of the Biggs plant. He had heroically tried to hold himself back, but he had failed, so he took the occasion to make a careful scrutiny of the factory. It was shabby, ill kept;

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behind the main building several ramshackle lean-tos overran the lot, piles of lumber and racks of steel were poorly sheltered from the weather by sagging sheds.

The office, itself, however, when Joey entered, was surprisingly clean and businesslike and he was quickly shown in to Mr. Biggs. The latter was a full-faced worried man in a shiny alpaca office coat; he regarded Joey not unpleasantly over his glasses.

Mr. Biggs began frankly enough: "I saw your ad. and sent for you, but——" He paused while his amiable eyes measured his caller from head to foot. "You're a much younger man than I expected." The speaker's look of doubt was eloquent.

"I'm getting over that at the rate of one year per annum," Joey told him, with a grin, then assuming a smart, business-like brevity: "I deal in results, Mr. Biggs. That is all I sell, that is all you're interested in."

Mr. Biggs nodded, and began again: "Well, there's something wrong with us; I don't know what it is. We've been in business here for twenty-five years, and we've made money. But for the last year we've been losing it. I've had to yell for help. It seems foolish to turn to a youngster like you who doesn't know the business. First off, what's your charge?"

Joey had learned something of efficiency during these past months, therefore he had anticipated this

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question and his answer was ready. "If I can't help you, I shan't ask any fee. When I have a remedy—the remedy—I'll talk price, and show you what you're paying for."

To this Mr. Biggs murmured, "Fair, I should say."

"In the meantime," Joey resumed, briskly, "I'll merely ask for a nominal drawing account of five dollars for each day I put in on the job. It will probably take me a month to correctly diagnose your difficulty."

"That's better than I hoped for," Mr. Biggs confessed. "Most of you efficiency engineers are mainly interested in the size of your retainers."

Joey realized with supreme relief that his own efficiency problem was solved, temporarily at least, now that something was coming in, and he figured rapidly that he had thirty days of grace in which to dope out the trouble with the Buggy Company. Surely he could do it in that time; then it would doubtless require another thirty days to install his system and try it out, whatever that system might prove to be. Sixty days—three hundred dollars. Manna from heaven!

"I have my own method of approach in these matters," he told Mr. Biggs, "and I propose to spend the first week or two in your factory." To this the latter agreed readily enough.

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It did not occur to Joey to demand the history sheets of the company in the shape of its last few annual statements; instead he plunged into an immediate study of the plant itself.

The factory he found to be equipped with presses for shaping steel buggy bodies; there was a machine, a blacksmith, and a paint shop, together with an assembling room. Few men were employed—far fewer than the size of the establishment warranted—and they were engaged in building special bodies for coupés and hacks. The entire place was well kept; nevertheless, there was an atmosphere of inertia, of idleness enveloping it. After examining the plant, Joey carried his inspection out into the yard and estimated the stock of materials carried. Having finished this, he knew no more than when he started, which was quite natural inasmuch as he had been figuring backward, from effect to cause.

For a week Joey Dunn studied that plant, and although he maintained a pose of deep concentration, although he pretended to make discoveries that pleased and satisfied him, in reality he was utterly stumped, completely at sea. His smattering acquaintance with "motion problems," factory scheduling, planning, routing, and the like gained at Helm's Business College, availed him nothing; nor could he draw for help upon his practical experience, for the latter had been confined to routine

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clerical work. Of financing, of administrative functioning and up-to-date sales and purchasing methods, he knew as little as a child.

Joey, in the meantime, had become acquainted with most of the employees and he was uncomfortably aware of their curiosity concerning him. He realized that they looked upon him as the business Elijah, the commercial prestidigitator, and were waiting for him to take the rabbit out of the hat. At a complete standstill finally, he approached McCormick, the superintendent, and inquired frankly,

"Say, Mac, what the deuce ails this factory, anyhow? Everybody is on their toes, the work goes forward well enough, and the machinery is O. K."

Mac smiled. "It ain't hard to see what ails us; we're behind the times. People ain't buying buggies, that's all. They're buying automobiles, and we'd ought to be making automobile bodies."

"Well, why don't you?"

The superintendent laughed. "The reason is because we'd need new equipment, new dies, new salesmen, a new factory with more floor space, new customers, and—new capital. I don't think of any other reasons, but there may be some."

Mr. Dunn, efficiency expert, saw a great light. He was tempted to kick himself. He realized that he had overlooked the obvious, and he vowed never

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again to do so. Tools, machinery, factory, salesmen, customers, and money, that was all the Biggs Body and Buggy Company needed. Simple, wasn't it? Well, hell needed a good climate and nice people, and no doubt credit for that discovery belonged to some other efficiency expert. What now concerned Joey was the proper prescription to write, for his own task was not merely to diagnose, but also to cure. Lacking that ability, he must confess himself a quack.

Dinner that evening for Joey Dunn was not an expensive meal. In the presence of this new problem his stomach refused to function, as completely as did his brain, and for the first time vague doubts of his ability as an efficiency engineer assailed him. And yet, he reasoned bravely, principle is immutable; the mere fact that there is a wrong way to do business argues that there must be a right way.

He sat late, thinking deeply, but to no avail, and then for relief before going to bed he opened and read his weekly number of the Lockport *Argus*. He had always kept up his subscription to the paper, for it remained the one link connecting him with his past and with Maggie Knapp. Lockport had grown some, these last few years; its prosperity had likewise increased, but signs of other changes Joey could not detect. The same people figured in the local column; Welch Travis had bought the O. K. Drug

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Store; the Crève-Cœur Club dances were now being held in the new Elks' Hall; Miss Margaret Knapp had returned from a trip abroad; Mr. Pegland had sciatica.

Joey smiled at memory of the "Maude" letters and his night work in the carriage plant. Funny that he should be working at this moment for a similar concern. And the Phoenix Shirtwaist Factory, employing over one hundred hands, which he had helped to capture. How far away it all seemed, how funny— All of a sudden Mr. Dunn's eyes widened and a startled look crept into them; for a moment he sat motionless, then he leaped to his feet and addressed himself thus:

"Why, you poor simp, are you blind? Can't you see *anything* when it's right under your nose? Here's the answer—it's perfectly obvious."

Joey startled Mr. Biggs the next morning with the abrupt announcement, "Well, sir, I'm ready to make my recommendations and state my terms."

Mr. Biggs looked up with some interest.

"To begin with, the demand for buggies is over, but your organization and experience equips you for the manufacture of automobile bodies. For that you need more presses, new dies, more floor space and yard room, new buildings, salesmen, customers, and capital."

Mr. Biggs nodded calmly. "Am I supposed to pay

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you five dollars a day for telling me something I've known for two years?"

Joey waved aside the question. "You furnish the salesmen and the customers, I'll get the rest."

"What?"

Joey met Mr. Biggs's incredulous gaze with a confident smile. "I'll secure ample factory-buildings, more yard room than you need, and enough capital to buy the machinery to start you off. Now for my terms."

Mr. Biggs nodded and exclaimed, "Yes! Now for the catch."

"There's no catch about it," Joey warmly declared. "This is my line of business, my specialty. My terms are——" Despite the speaker's assurance his voice became throaty and he could barely control its quaver. "My terms will be a twenty per cent stock interest in the reorganized company, and twenty per cent of all the money I raise. All I need is your authority to go ahead, and a contract covering the agreement."

Mr. Biggs blinked, gasped faintly, then said, doubtfully: "I—don't believe you can do it. You ain't old enough. But—it won't hurt to try. Go ahead and draw up your papers."

That afternoon Joey wrote a letter on the stationery of the Biggs Body and Buggy Company to the Madison City Chamber of Commerce, asking if that

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organization cared to offer inducements which might lead his company, employing two hundred men, to locate there. The same mail carried a letter on his personal stationery to Mr. Elbert G. Knapp, president of the Lockport Chamber of Commerce. It was marked "Confidential," and Joey spent considerable time in drafting it.

Within twenty-four hours came telegrams from both cities, and soon thereafter delegations of prominent citizens followed. The latter interviewed Mr. Biggs and within a week there began a mighty warfare between the rival towns. The battle raged for a month; its outcome was reported in the Lockport *Argus* under the following scare head:

LOCKPORT LANDS BIGGS AUTO BODY COMPANY.

Beneath this was a story of the success of the Chamber of Commerce in locating "this mammoth company, employing two hundred men, in our fair city." As an inducement, it was announced, the company had been given suitable factory buildings on a ten-acre tract, the former home of the Lockport Carriage Works, now defunct, and a cash bonus of twenty-five thousand dollars. "Credit for bringing this gigantic enterprise to our fair city," so ran the *Argus*, "belongs to Mr. Jos. Dunn, a former Lockport boy and quondam contributor to these columns.

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Mr. Dunn, or Joey, as he is still known to his hosts of admiring Lockport friends, has gained a world-wide reputation as a captain of industry and an efficiency expert. In securing for his native town the Biggs Auto Body Company—of which Mr. Dunn chances to be vice-president—he has not only gained a splendid home for his institution, but also he has caused the red corpuscles of energized blood to pulse anew through the veins of Lockport. Madison City fought hard to get this great modern enterprise, but the superior attractions of our fair city, and the aggressiveness of her citizens, brilliantly generated by President Knapp of the Chamber of Commerce and the Improvement Association, were forces too potent for our sleepy neighbor beside the Lake. We predict she will sink back into her accustomed lethargy only to become semiconscious at hourly intervals when the Interurban arrives from Lockport——”

There were three columns of it. In the privacy of his Chicago hall bedroom, Joey Dunn devoured every word, then he sat long with the paper in his hand. What a tide of memories this issue of the *Argus* brought back! By what a little margin he had missed failure in this, his first successful step. Well, he had learned his lesson. He would quit straining after laborious effects and great inspirations; he would train himself to exercise just ordi-

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nary, uninspired common sense and to do the obvious thing, but do it better than the other fellow.

It was time now to make a triumphal return to his boyhood home and to pick up the broken fragments of his one great romance. Something told him he could fit them together again, for he knew that Maggie Knapp was still free.

III

Joey took a room for the week end at the Lockport Hotel, then he called upon Mr. Knapp. He found no need to hint for an invitation to the Knapp home; before he had been five minutes in the banker's office the latter had insisted that he come to dinner that very night.

That first evening with Maggie was the most thrilling that Joey had ever experienced. The girl had changed greatly, as she showed by welcoming him with a graciousness and a warmth entirely at variance with her attitude in those days when he had openly courted her. Nor was she any longer the spoiled daughter of a small-town banker. She had developed into a well-poised young woman of the world, mistress of herself and of so many social accomplishments that Joey became very self-conscious, very awkward in her presence. She flattered him immensely by calling him "Joey" and by insisting

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that to him she was "Maggie," as always. As a matter of fact, she never had been "Maggie" to him, except on the disastrous occasion of that last hack ride, and then, as he well remembered, without her own consent.

Mr. Knapp was proud of his daughter; he conveyed the impression that all Lockport was vain of her accomplishments, her beauty, and that she was still the toast of the town—a fact which Joey had no mind to question.

Warmed by their friendliness during dinner, Joey yielded to a talkative impulse and confessed to the shameless methods he had pursued in drawing Maggie's name for the Crève-Cœur dances. Both Mr. Knapp and his daughter genuinely enjoyed the story, and Maggie conveyed her grateful appreciation of the implied compliment.

"You can't hold down a boy like that," Mr. Knapp declared, admiringly.

"It all seems ages ago," Maggie smiled reminiscently. "You would never know the club now."

"Of course you still go to the dances?"

Miss Knapp shook her head. "Not often. My reading and my music keep me pretty busy."

"Maggie must play for you," Mr. Knapp broke in. "She's making music her life's work, you know, and—well, wait till you hear her! She could have gone on the concert stage. She's head of the McDowell

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Club, and president of the Literary Forum, and organizer of the Ladies' Club for the Study and Advancement of the Short Story, and——"

Miss Knapp implored her father not to bore Joey with the uninteresting details of her activities, then explained, "Lockport is a dear little town and I adore it, but"—her lovely brows arched plaintively—"it doesn't stimulate or broaden one. There is no intellectual or artistic contact, and—that makes it hard."

During the evening she played for Joey, brilliantly interpreting classics that he neither understood nor appreciated. She discussed academic topics of the day with a fluency that he could not match; she told him of her busy life; she described her impressions of the Norwegian fjords, and discussed Florentine tapestries.

Failing to obtain any vital response, she tried him out on literature, and, finding him absent without leave, shifted back to Lockport doings, all with a tact so delicate as to arouse his keenest admiration.

Maggie had always been a pretty girl and her prettiness had ripened into positive beauty. Money, culture, travel had been hers; why, then, Joey asked himself, was she unmarried? He repeated this question more than once during the evening, and when he left the Knapp home at a late hour he propounded another query to himself, *viz.*, why was it

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that, despite her very patent efforts to be extremely nice to him, she had left him utterly cold?

By the time Joey had arrived at his hotel he was forced to acknowledge the unwelcome truth. His dream was out, his romance was smashed—into smaller bits now than on that night in the Depot Bus Line carriage. Gone entirely was his desire for the girl. It was strange; he could not understand it. He had arrived at the Knapp home that evening full of enthusiasm for his own work, bursting with tidings of his accomplishments, eager to share them with the one girl in whom he had ever taken a sentimental interest, the one girl who had always lived in his thoughts, but he had interested her as little as she had interested him. He had talked about himself when occasion offered—being a normal male human being, that was his favorite indoor pastime—but he had failed to stir her. For the first time he suspected himself of being a shallow, uninspired, commonplace person, very tiresome and dull to everybody except himself. Maggie, on the contrary, was splendid, only it took too much brains to appreciate her. She was out of his class. It was mighty nice of her to give herself so prodigally, and he had to hand it to that finishing school. It had certainly done its work well. But—it was all a very great disappointment to him.

The Biggs Auto Body Company prospered in its

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new home, and that prosperity was reflected in the fortunes of Joey Dunn. Calls began to come in upon him from various directions, and within a short time he had found a home in Lockport for another concern, the Atlas Tile and Culvert Company. He had learned the formula now; he did not try to improve upon it.

Like a hawk he soared abroad, looking for crippled business concerns, and he swooped down upon them much as that predatory bird swoops down upon motherless chicks, but instead of destroying them he bore them back to Lockport—and other towns—and gave them a new lease of life. It paid him well; he became known to sundry chambers of commerce and improvement associations throughout the State, and although his “systems” and advanced forms of office procedure were not revolutionary, nevertheless he delivered the kind of goods needed—namely, new blood in the form of capital, new plants and locations—and therefore his clients hailed him as a deliverer. It was a sort of root-pruning process, and in the increased fruitage thereof he shared.

Of course the game worked both ways. Lockport profited by the coming of these new plants, and the more of them it assimilated the hungrier it grew. Joey landed the Vulcan Forge Company, the Ajax Roofing Corporation, the Agile Knitting Works, the

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Ever Ready Biscuit plant, and the Miracle Soap Factory.

Three years of this and he found that he was well-to-do. He had interests in a dozen growing concerns, he was a director in many of them, and he had considerable outside investments. He was on the board of the First National Bank of Lockport, and an influence in the town.

Naturally he saw much of Maggie Knapp, for he spent a good deal of time in Lockport. She, too, had continued her growth. Everyone spoke of her as a very "superior" young lady, her time and her talents were in constant demand, and of both she gave without stint. But she did not marry. Joey discovered that while she was considered popular, she never had much company, and such young men as called did so formally and in ever-diminishing numbers.

It was a puzzle to Joey Dunn. He admired Maggie immensely, and he genuinely liked her, but there his sentiment ended. This in itself was the more puzzling because she had arrived at that age when her capabilities were fullest and when she should have inspired real love in any ordinary man.

During one of his visits Maggie spoke to him in some concern.

"You remember the old Phoenix Shirtwaist Factory?" she began. "Well, it has become one of our

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problems, and father says you are the only man who can help the town out."

"I presume you mean it is in a bad way financially?"

"Yes, but that's not the point. Father says the company is going to retain you—I think that's the word—anyhow, they are going to get you to give them more money or something. I don't understand business, it doesn't interest me in the least, but here is something I do understand. It is becoming impossible to keep servants in this town, for the girls all go to the Shirtwaist Factory. They'd rather be employees than hired girls—they get better pay and the hours are shorter. In my social-welfare work I've found that a workingman can hardly get a wife in this town." Miss Knapp's intelligent brown eyes were eloquent of this tragedy. When Joey asked her to go on she continued, "The Phoenix Shirtwaist Factory is a bad thing for the town, a—a——"

"Liability?"

"Exactly. For goodness sake don't save it. Let it go to smash."

Joey pondered this request with some interest. "That shocks everything in me," he confessed, "but I'll see what I can do to save the servant problem and perpetuate the working class." He looked up, then continued, "You're a peculiar girl, Maggie. I——"

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"Yes?"

"If I knew you better I'd like to have a frank talk with you."

"Why, Joey! Who knows me better than you?"

But Joey shook his head in some embarrassment. "Maybe I'll have something to ask you one of these days—a proposition to make."

Maggie stirred; the faintest additional tinge of color came into her smooth cheeks. "You should be able to say anything you wish to me. You're my—very best friend."

A few days later the Phoenix Shirtwaist Company offered Joey a proposition to reorganize its business, and he accepted, upon a profitable basis. He examined its buildings and decided they would be suitable to house a gasping Laundry Machine Company which had appealed to him for oxygen, and that afternoon he drove over to Madison City. Joey had never liked Madison City, therefore he handed it the Phoenix Shirtwaist Factory and placed the Laundry Machine Company in its old plant. In due time the Madison City *Dispatch* carried a heavy-leaded leader on its front page reading:

MADISON CITY CAPTURES THE HUGE PHŒNIX SHIRTWAIST FACTORY

and the youthful financier found himself upon the directorate of two new corporations.

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Factories were beginning to pall upon Joey Dunn by this time; he was beginning to think about consolidations. He was bored at his accommodations at the Lockport Hotel, and the big city called him, nevertheless he lingered, for there yet remained one problem in efficiency that intrigued his deepest interest as an expert.

It was his business and his hobby to analyze failures, to reorganize them, and to make them into successes. The most pronounced failure, the plainest example of an unprofitable concern—it was the hardened efficiency man thinking—was Margaret Knapp. She had everything. Why didn't she sell, attract, show results? Here was a rich, beautiful, accomplished girl. Why did she repel men? Why was she practically off the marriage market? It was a case that would have appealed to any specialist in the business of assets realizations, and one which no expert in that calling could have ignored.

Joey believed the reason to be obvious, but whether he would be permitted to effect a cure was another matter. Nevertheless, having a remedy—a "system"—he could not resist putting it to the test.

Maggie was entertaining him the next evening, giving much of herself, as usual, and demanding nothing of him, when without any warning he inquired.

"How old are you, Maggie?"

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"What a funny question!" she exclaimed. "Don't you know?"

"You're nearly thirty." There was a pause, "Don't you like men?"

"Why—yes."

"Lockport men?"

Miss Knapp shrugged. "As well as any. They're pretty narrow, that's all. I've studied, traveled, seen more than they."

"There are some big chaps here—fellows who will be heard from."

"Possibly, but we seem to have very little in common."

Joey persisted in his catechism. "Do you care for women?" He was reading Maggie's books—her annual statements—preparatory to diagnosing the cause for her failure as a woman; in him was nothing more personal than the zeal of the keen, inquiring, commercial expert.

"Not particularly," Maggie told him. "But why this cross-examination?"

"I told you I'd have something to ask you one of these days—a proposition to make. Well——"

Miss Knapp nodded. She paled a trifle, but her eyes continued steadfastly to meet his. While Joey was searching for the right words with which to continue, she said, gently, "Why don't you speak out?"

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"Because I don't want to risk losing your friendship."

Miss Knapp made an eloquent little gesture. Something, perhaps the growing intensity of her regard, made Joey uncomfortable, therefore he broke out briskly in his most professional manner.

"Maggie, I'm a doctor, a diagnostician of business concerns. I've made a success of selling efficiency methods. Usually I'm well paid, but this time I volunteer my services. I've diagnosed you, and I want to prescribe."

Miss Knapp gasped, "Prescribe? For what? What on earth——?"

During the next few minutes Joey Dunn lectured on efficiency, commercial, social, personal. When his hearer finally sensed the drift of his remarks she listened midway between tears and laughter, between anger and amusement. It was no small tribute to her character that she heard him through, for, as delicately as he could put the matter, his conclusions were anything but complimentary.

There was a queer timbre to the girl's voice when she murmured, finally: "Perhaps I have failed utterly as a woman, at least in your eyes, but—it's hard to forgive a man, even a dear friend, for saying so. Just out of curiosity, however, I'd like to hear your cure for this—this so-called lack of efficiency."

"It's simple enough if you analyze it as I have,"

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Joey declared, with conviction. "You give too much of yourself and you take nothing. That's your trouble, Maggie. The test of a person is the reaction he or she sets up in others—the profit he takes. You live in your own world, you never go out of it and into the other person's world. You fill the eye and the ear completely, satisfactorily, but your own are empty. You arouse only admiration for your own accomplishments and your splendid character. Now then, you've got to learn to awaken other people's appreciation of themselves and of *their* characters. You've got to learn to listen and to understand. You've got to get into the other fellow's life and take an interest in it. Then watch him respond! Why, when I first came here to see you I was dying to tell you a lot of things about myself, but—I've never yet got around to it. You didn't let me. They say it is more blessed to give than to receive. Bunk! Language is full of pernicious falsehoods like that. Encourage others to give—the very best that's in them. Understand, I'm talking professionally; there is nothing personal——"

Miss Knapp burst into a tremulous laugh. "Of course. But what shall I gain by all this? Marriage? What makes you think I want to marry?"

"Every woman does," Joey declared. "Besides, you're too splendid to be an old maid. I can make you one hundred per cent efficient, Maggie, if you'll

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let me. Will you permit me to—to reorganize you? Will you let me install my system, and give it a fair trial?”

“Perhaps.”

“Good! I always assume that to mean yes. So we’ll start right now by cutting out the giving and by teaching you how blessed it is to receive. Lockport is a town of young business concerns and young business men, all growing. I’m going to teach you more about the world those fellows live in than they know themselves.”

“And all so that I can marry some rising financial genius?”

For the life of him Joey could not determine what emotion caused the catch in Miss Knapp’s voice, what accounted for the strained look about her eyes. Very professionally he said, “We’ll leave the result to take care of itself. I intend to make you into a going concern.”

Many evenings with Miss Knapp followed this heart-to-heart talk, busy evenings for both expert and experted. The lust of the efficiency man was in Joey’s blood and he was too deeply engrossed in his hobby to heed anything except results. He expounded, now on the advantages of the time clock as against registry sheets in factories, again upon open shops as against tightly unionized plants, or the Macy system for determining overheads. He and

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Maggie went to the movies, but only to look at pictures of automobile manufacture, the evolution of the American locomotive, or modern methods of deep mining. More than once the girl found her part hard to play—found little of interest in an advanced discussion of the modern tendencies of collective bargaining or the theory of the mariner's compass—but she resolutely held herself to her purpose.

And she proved to be an apt pupil. Joey discovered that she had a brain, a personality, a depth of intellect which surprised even him who knew her best. Results came in due time and Joey rejoiced. Men began coming to the Knapp home, and they stayed longer than formerly. Maggie began to refuse invitations out, as in the old days, her evenings with Joey became more and more infrequent, and he realized, with the glow of an enthusiast, that his efforts were gaining ground. He had all but added one more success to his credit.

One day they drove over to Gary to visit the steel mills, and spent a strenuous afternoon following the ore through its butterfly changes, from the red chrysalis to the pig, then into the open-hearth furnaces, out through the clashing rolls, and on to its final structural shapes. To Joey the mammoth plant was an inspiring example of efficiency energized. Here dwelt the god of twentieth-century commerce in

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all his naked strength and splendor, here was typified the essence of modern life and accomplishment.

They had dinner together, then rode home through the night, and Joey broke the news of his first big consolidation, a scheme he had been working on for some time, and the negotiations for which had arrived at a point where he would soon have to leave Lockport for the East.

Maggie listened so well, her brief comments were so much to the point, so anticipative, so intelligent, that he went into more detail than he had intended. Under the urge of her quick understanding, he talked rapidly, and as he talked his vision quickened, his imagination kindled, he began to see possibilities he had not before discerned. There in that limousine, spurred on by the keen appreciation of this girl, his enterprise took definite, formal shape. He paused finally, exhausted.

After a while Maggie told him, "I'll miss you terribly when you go, Joey."

He smiled down at her. "When I get back we'll go on with the course. Shall we?"

But Miss Knapp shook her head and nestled her chin closer into the fur at her neck. "The course is finished," she declared. Ignoring his start of surprise, she explained. "Your theories were correct, Joey, and the results are just what you said they

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would be. I'm a going concern. Roger Britton has asked me to marry him."

"*What?*" Joey leaned closer, with an expression of shocked incredulity upon his face. His eyes widened; they searched Maggie's countenance in sudden bewilderment, reproach, anxiety. He took the girl's hand in his and stammered,

"Roger Britton! Why, he's a perfect fool! Maggie—Margaret dear, you wouldn't marry *him*?"

There was a queer brightness to Miss Knapp's gaze as it met Joey's, but she spoke quietly:

"I didn't know you disapproved of Roger."

"I—I——" Joey swallowed hard, for it was news to him also, but of a sudden he had taken a most positive dislike to Mr. Britton. The man was an ass, a presumptuous upstart. There was no doubt of it.

"He says I have been a great help to him," Maggie continued. "My understanding and my interest in his affairs have been an inspiration, so he says——"

"Inspiration! Of course. You inspire everybody. You've inspired me—just now, right here to-night. Why——" Joey withdrew himself slightly, for at that instant he saw his companion in an altogether new light and the effect was bewildering. Maggie married! To Roger Britton! It was impossible.

Joey sat open mouthed and open eyed, yet un-

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breathing, unseeing, and meanwhile Maggie regarded him with that same queer fixed look of bright inquiry and defiance. Had he been as observant as usual he would have noted, perhaps, that her teeth were set in her lower lip as if to still its quivering and that her throat, beneath the deep fur neck-piece, was swelling as if she too had difficulty in swallowing. Had he been able to read her mind he would have been amazed at her panicky repetition of one of his elemental efficiency maxims to the effect that the prime essential of salesmanship is in knowing when and how to close a deal.

But Joey's gaze was turned inward and he saw nothing except himself; his thoughts were tumbling. They tumbled forth finally in speech, and he cried, desperately:

"Oh, Margaret! Roger doesn't love you—he *can't* love you as—as I do. Why, dear——"

What more Joey Dunn said he never knew, but he found Margaret in his arms at last and his lips were damp with her kisses. Her face was close to his, a lasting contentment was written upon it.

It must have been some time later that he urged, eagerly, joyously, "Let's be married quickly, so that you can go East with me Monday." When she hesitated, he ran on: "Please, dear, I need you so. Why, we'll put over that consolidation together, you and I!"

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At this Margaret nodded, and her eyes sparkled through their misty lashes. "Perhaps it would be best," she agreed, "and while we're East maybe we can find time to visit the new Midvale Plant and the Hog Island Shipyards."

THE TALKING VASE

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THREE characteristics of the human countenance Joe Thomas abhorred—curly hair, a Grecian profile, and “romantic” eyes. Physical perfection is all right in a museum; in the home it is loathsome. If Adonis had a room-mate—or, better, a barber—it is safe to say the latter yearned to cut his throat, for who could repeatedly shave a cheek, a chin as smooth and as flawless as flesh can be: who could daily vaseline a head of wavy midnight hair with just the right curl to tempt unruly feminine fingers without praying for pimples and dandruff?

Nevertheless, that is precisely what Joe Thomas was called upon to do, for the cheeks, the chin, the throat, the hair were his. Out from his mirror gazed a pair of haunting, languorous eyes fringed like the gentian. He had tried cutting off the lashes, but they came in longer and thicker than ever, and they curled. His was the fatal curse of beauty.

Joe had been marked by this hideous peculiarity as a child; in fact, he and Myrtle Sawyer had been

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the prettiest children in town and they had won prizes at baby shows. Myrtle, as she grew older, lived down her past, but with Joe the disgrace lingered. Even after his voice changed and the pink down of adolescence appeared upon his lip, people continued to refer to him as "that perfect boy," and some of the women spoke of the dimples in his back. Joe's face was that of a sixteen-year-old cherub and his lips were like rosebuds, but at references such as these there issued from him language—well, language that went with a full and unkempt beard. When he grew old enough to earnestly envy the ugliness of other boys and to realize that he could neither freckle nor grow warts, no matter how he tried, a burning resentment took charge of him and he fought with his playmates. Frequently he was licked by those homely boys, but in spite of his desperate disregard of consequences his perfect features possessed the resiliency of rubber and malignant nature healed the marks of battle. Nothing he could do resulted in permanent disfigurement. As age laid muscle upon his frame, he more often came home a winner, and by the time he had graduated from "Tech" as an electrical engineer, his reputation as a willing and able rough-and-tumbler had become such that only comparative strangers complimented him upon his looks.

He was beginning to hope that he had finally laid

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his ghost when one day Sol Ginsberg, a friend of public-school days, wrote him from Hollywood urging him to come West and go into "pictures." Ginsberg had gone to California as an assistant camera man, and through the display of talents entirely unsuspected by his schoolmates he had risen, meteor-like, to the dignity of producer.

"I can make of you a big hit," the enthusiastic Ginsberg wrote, "if only you screen as good as you look, and I bet you would. We can easy change your name to something classy, like Pedro de Ventura, now that these wop leading men have got the women boiling. All I expect is I should get a nice long term contract in case I put you over. It beats the wireless business, Joe, which ain't got anything solid behind it."

Joe started to answer the letter, but thought better of it, for the postal regulations governing obscenity are rigid. Instead, he swallowed the temptation and went on with his radio experiments. But thereafter he detested motion pictures. That detestation ripened into a positive hatred when Myrtle Sawyer won a beauty contest which carried with it a trip to the Coast and a rôle in "Passion's Pawn," a crashing super-special in preparation by the Hyman Film Productions.

Sick with apprehension, cold with dread, Joe called

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upon Myrtle the evening the announcement appeared in the local paper.

"You don't intend to accept this crazy offer, do you?" he inquired.

"Why, of course I do!" Myrtle's blue eyes were starry with excitement. "I'm as thrilled as a bunny, Joe."

"What the devil is your family thinking of?" he growled.

"Why, *Joe!* It's the chance of a lifetime!"

"Sure! Chance to be mauled around by some plumber in a sport shirt; chance to be thrown over a cliff into the arms of Handsome Harold, the perfect male thirty-eight. If I ever see you kissing one of those 'nature's noblemen' with a divided chin and movable eyebrows—I— That's all the movies are, kissing games!"

Miss Sawyer flushed. "You always hated kissing games, didn't you?"

"Of course. Mother's friends licked my face shiny until my beard got rough. They kissed me until I smelled sour. If you'll cut out this nonsense——"

"It *isn't* nonsense," Myrtle declared, earnestly. "I'm going to make my fortune."

"You don't need a fortune. I'll——"

"It's my chance for a career. Motion pictures is

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the fourth largest business in America, Joe. I must think of my future."

"There's a big future in electrical supplies and radio equipment, too. I'm working out a new telephone—"The Phone Beautiful," I call it. Why talk into an ugly iron thing instead of into a vase or an ornamental——?"

"You're so practical, so—matter of fact! So is everybody." Myrtle sighed. "Girls want romance, adventure. Of course I may not screen well——"

"No danger of that." Joe frowned darkly. "If you tackle this, I'm going to start right in burning down moving-picture theatres."

Myrtle, of course, was flattered by Joe's jealousy, but it was more flattering by far to be selected as the most beautiful of ten thousand beautiful girls, and before her the gates of the world had opened. Through them she glimpsed an enchanting realm of glittering possibilities. Fame beckoned her and Fortune smiled. What girl could hesitate? Long and earnestly Joe argued, but in time Myrtle went West.

Several months later Joe was surprised to receive a call from Sol Ginsberg, president of Gins-Art Productions, Inc. Mr. Ginsberg had a single-track mind and he had come for an answer to his letter.

"You got a picture face, Joe, if ever I saw one, and I've seen a million. Maybe if you'd show me

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you can act a little I'd put you right in my next serial."

"I'll show you exactly how I can act," Joe began, venomously; then his brow cleared and he laughed outright. "Did you come all the way from the Coast to offer me a job?"

"N-no. I had other business. You ain't got to act much, Joe. Leave it to the director. Got any stills?"

"I'm an electrician, not a bootlegger."

"Still pictures; photographs. It's types we——"

"I hate everything about moving pictures, and I loathe moving-picture actors."

"All the same, it pays better than stringin' wires." Ginsberg cast a disdainful eye over Joe's place of business.

Joe opened his mouth to explain that he was an engineer, an inventor, but he doubted if Sol would understand the difference, so he said: "Come in here. I want to talk to you." He led the caller into his office and seated him. Then, "Tell me, how are you getting along?"

Ginsberg shrugged. "Oh, we all got our troubles, I s'pose! Pictures ain't so good lately. Competition, you know. Two fellers I'd like to kill, Joe—the guys that invented competition and overhead. Compared with them robbers, Frank and Jesse James was a couple of nice boys. No sooner I spend a for-

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tune making a star than along comes Ad Hyman or the Notable or some other bird of prayer and hires her away. Only one artist on the lot you can absolutely depend to work every day and that's the famous Hebrew heavy, Mr. Morris W. Overhead."

"What sort of a fellow is Hyman?" Joe inquired, curiously.

"Don't ask me! I wouldn't talk about him. He's a vulture, Joe. It ain't enough I should lose to him Miriam Donaldson and Bush Thorndyke, the two best money-getters in the business, he takes with 'em my best continuity writer by offering him screen credit. On top of that somebody at the home office hears the great Anna Turin sing 'Tosca' and right away signs her up to make five Gins-Art features, with a private car both ways from New York. Anna Turin!" Ginsberg moaned like an autumn breeze.

"I supposed Turin was a great find."

"Ain't I telling you? They couldn't of found another like her if they looked a year. Her first picture cost us a hundred and eighty thousand dollars, two script writers, and the best director on the lot. Poor Jimmy Lord! I just left him in West Baden. Nervous indigestion and shell shock. He cries steady and can't eat only bran muffins. Battle Creek is the place for him, but he can't stand the name."

"What is the picture like?"

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Ginsberg stared at the speaker with the eye of a hunted deer. "One reel of titles and action and six reels of close-ups of the star. Sure! Pictures is a great business. Another hit by Turin and Gins-Art goes under the hammer. Already her spirit control has advised her to hire a lawyer for fear we break the contract."

"Spirit control?"

"Sure. Since this feller Doyle got his name in the papers, Hollywood does nothing but tip tables and hold slate writings. The bootleggers have turned mediums—more money in it and they don't have to split with the police. It's so you can't sign up even a character woman without she should first consult the unseen world, and then you don't know if you got a good signature to the contract or the monaker of some dear departed that wouldn't hold in court. It looks like Ad Hyman has got a drag in the spirit world, because all the good actors that quit Gins-Art right away sign with him. Crooked business men I can get along with, Joe, when they're alive, but how you going to compete with a lot of slick ghosts? I ask you."

Here was something that interested Joe Thomas, and for some time he questioned the producer. Friendship, perhaps it was, that induced the latter to lay bare his hidden worries. Truly, those worries were by no means trivial, for Turin was a terrible

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quince and her contract alone, if carried out, was enough to wreck a stronger organization than Gins-Art. Moreover, it did indeed look as if Sol's company was on the spirit black-list, for what few capable people it still retained were threatening to desert and go to his rival.

"But there, I been crying about my troubles and you probably got plenty of your own," the picture man sighed. "Business good?"

"Fine. I've perfected a new idea in telephones—'The Phone Beautiful'—and it's bound to go over. Why not make the telephone a thing of artistic beauty?"

"Why not?" Ginsberg nodded vacantly. Then, "How about three hundred a week, Joe? And if I put you across——"

Mr. Thomas exploded. "Not for three thousand. I tell you I'm poisoned on pictures."

"Then why you been taking all this time——?"

"Because——" the speaker flushed. "It's on account of Myrtle. She won that beauty contest of the Hyman Film Company."

"I know." Ginsberg smiled wanly. "It's the only piece of luck I had that he got her instead of Gins-Art."

"Why? Isn't she any good?" Joe inquired, hopefully.

"She's a lemon! Mind you, now, Myrtle I like.

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Ain't I known her all my life? But for an actress—I'd sooner have a trained seal. This here 'Passion's Pawn' is a complete flop."

"Then I'm afraid"—Joe rose and took a nervous turn about the room—"there's something in what I've heard."

"What you heard?"

"That Hyman is interested in her; wants to marry her. She was engaged to me when she left here."

"So? That's tough. But, Joe, a lotta girls have thought Hyman wanted to marry 'em and he didn't. That's how he works."

"I've been waiting for her to get sick of the game and come home, but he has signed her up for a year."

"He should worry if she can't act, with the company paying her salary. Of course she don't know she's rotten. None of 'em do. I s'pose her spirit control——"

"Has she fallen for that stuff?"

"I don't know. Most of 'em have. Lord, Joe, if you was a good medium instead of a bum electrician, we'd—clean up."

After a moment Joe Thomas astonished his caller by quietly declaring, "I am."

"Am what?"

"A—medium."

"Hush!"

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"I'm—psychic, in a way. Anyhow, I can talk with the dead, if that would do us any good."

Sol Ginsberg breathed heavily, then, after a searching stare, he reached for his hat and rose, saying; "Well, Joe, I gotta be getting along."

But the other laid a detaining hand upon his arm. "Wait. You've been complaining about malicious spirits ruining your business. Suppose I could put you in touch with some friendly spooks that would boost you and knock Hyman."

"Are you kidding? Of course there ain't any such thing as spirits. All the same, I'd be willing to sign up one that I could count on and let him name his own salary."

"If I could convert you, I'd have no trouble convincing those people in Los Angeles, would I?"

"Convince 'em of what? Already they believe anything they're told. It's me you got to convince."

"Very well. Suppose you heard a spirit voice? Suppose it answered questions, foretold the future, withstood every test?"

"Honest, Joe, to try such foolishness on me is wasting time. It can't be done."

"Wait and see. You'll have to admit there are forces in nature vastly powerful, although unseen; dynamic possibilities we know almost nothing about. Well, I've discovered a method of communicating with the dead that none of your mediums know any-

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thing about. Billy Sunday never snatched a brand from the burning as quickly as I propose to yank you out of your disbelief. Sol, before you leave this room you are going to talk with your ancestors."

"Ha! Yiddish ghosts! All right. I'll fall for anything, once. Commence!"

It was nearly three hours later when Ginsberg left Joe Thomas's place of business. He wrung the engineer's hands and laughed excitedly. "Say, all the luck in the world ain't bad, after all. I'm a fifty-minute egg and when you get me going you've done something. Most of it I don't understand yet. I've been selling some of my Gins-Art stock on the quiet, but if your ghosts will talk in California like they do here——"

"They'll talk much better."

"Then I'm going to buy it in again. Wire me when you're ready to come and I'll have my press man plant a story in every Los Angeles paper. Jimmy Lord will be back by that time. He's been to some of them seances with Turin, and he's a bear on make-up. Take a tip, Joe, and grab a few shares of Gins-Art for yourself. These old-home spirits of ours will send 'em to par."

The more intellectual members of the Hollywood moving-picture colony were interested one morning to read that Professor Tremblay, the eminent scien-

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tist, had arrived on his way to the Orient in furtherance of his experiments in psychomancy, a particular phase of psychic research upon which he was the leading authority. The professor was en route to the interior of India, where he had previously spent several years studying spirit phenomena, and while he was reticent about the evidence already gathered, nevertheless he intimated that his forthcoming book would create a sensation.

Several people, Madame Turin among others, telephoned the investigator at his hotel, but succeeded only in speaking with his secretary, who informed them that Professor Tremblay was distressed at the amount of publicity he had received and positively would not consider anything in the way of a public appearance or a lecture. He was engrossed for the present in a series of exhaustive experiments with the famous Talking Vase, of which no doubt they had heard. In perhaps six months he would be ready to lay his conclusions before the world.

What was the Talking Vase? The secretary was amazed that the phenomenon was unknown to his hearers, inasmuch as the journal of the International Society had lately been full of it. It was a curious relic the professor had stumbled upon and psychic circles were in an uproar over it. Rightly, too, since

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it had rendered former methods of spirit communication antiquated.

News of this sort naturally created a buzz among Madame Turin and her psychically inclined friends; that buzz became a murmur when the scientist visited the Gins-Art lot.

Pressed for an explanation, Tremblay confided that Conan Doyle's experiments with spirit photography had induced him to take to India with him an expert camera man, hence his visit to the moving-picture capital.

Doctor Tremblay was a handsome, swarthy, impressive man. He wore a magnificent glossy black beard parted in the middle after the Oriental fashion. Ginsberg, Jimmy Lord, and Moe Apple, the Gins-Art head electrician, spent the better part of the day with him.

Myrtle Sawyer was genuinely surprised when Joe Thomas phoned her that evening explaining that he had come clear to the Coast just to see her, and she welcomed him when he called, a half hour later. Myrtle's gladness at sight of him was unaffected, but Joe soon discovered that a change had come over her; she was no longer the girl he had known. Camera blight had stricken her. Myrtle had been a modest creature, a trifle shy, in fact, and she had never displayed the faintest sign of conceit over her abundant good looks. But the movies had changed

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all that. Her personal appearance concerned her deeply, now; it absorbed her. She referred to it frequently and showed Joe a bewildering collection of stills, the while she talked about camera angles and back lighting and soft focuses. After they had sufficiently admired her photographs, she read him some thrilling press notices of "Passion's Pawn" and her work as the captive slave. At least they thrilled her. Next she showed Joe a fan magazine in which was an illustrated interview headed, "Fragrant Myrtle Sawyer, the Wonder Girl."

Joe read the story with some surprise, for Myrtle, it seemed, had in the course of a few months developed into an all-around athlete. There was a half-tone of her in riding breeches and polo belt kissing the nostril of a livery horse; another of her in golf clothes, removing a divot by means of a left-handed grip on a right-handed mashie, and a third view of the Wonder Girl smashing at a tennis ball that Tilden could not have reached from the end of a spring-board. Nor was that the half of it. "Fragrant Myrtle" was a skillful and an adventurous fisherwoman, also a crack shot—she had the clothes to show it. Joe feared to turn the page lest he should discover that she was also a high diver and dressed that part. Her passionate fondness for the out-of-doors, he read, arose only from her intense vitality and perfect health, but there was another, a softer,

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a more womanly side to her character:—she was a fancy cook and adored bungalow aprons. She loved her parents and all dumb animals. Myrtle Sawyer was a girl “you’d like to take home and introduce to your mother.”

Joe was glad there was one statement in the ghastly parody to which he could subscribe; he’d like to take her home and introduce her to *his* mother, all right—with instructions to give her a good spanking.

“It is all a part of Mr. Hyman’s publicity campaign,” Myrtle explained. “He’s a wonderful man.”

“Um-m! When do you start work on the next picture?”

“I don’t know. We haven’t found a script yet. He insists on a proper vehicle; so many stars have been killed by bad stories. I’m not really a star, of course, but he says——”

“Honestly, Myrtle, do you like this sort of thing?” Joe indicated the “Fragrant Myrtle” interview.

The girl flushed. “Certainly not. I hate it, just as I hate horses and guns and cooking. But I never earned a dollar in my life and it’s such fun to buy things with your own money. It’s all like a dream. There are so few things a girl can do, Joe. When she’s lucky enough to have a career offered her, why—she owes it to herself and to her family to make the most of her opportunity.”

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"It's a pretty good career to marry and live happily ever after. That's what all your photoplays are written about."

Myrtle nodded. A yearning light crept into her eyes, upon her face there came an expression the camera had never caught, and Joe Thomas realized that at heart she was still the Myrtle he knew and adored. He understood her, too. Poor, foolish, dazzled little kid! She was indeed walking in a dream. Her faith, her yearning, her determination to become rich and great were very natural, very girlish. He loved her the more tenderly for them.

Later, when he told her good night, he took her in his arms and kissed her. She struggled faintly, she protested in a shaky voice, but there were tears in her eyes, and the hands that held him off really clung to him. He was too wise, however, to take advantage of her momentary mood.

It was due to Madame Turin's persistence that Professor Tremblay finally consented to appear informally before her and her friends and demonstrate his mastery of psychic forces. As a return for the many courtesies of Sol Ginsberg, he suggested that his experiments be conducted in the latter's home.

On the appointed evening, the president of Gins-Art entertained a dozen or more guests at dinner, among whom were Miriam Donaldson and Bush

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Thorndyke, his former stars, and also Ad Hyman, their present employer. In spite of their poisonous rivalry, the two producers maintained an outward show of friendship. To-night Hyman was more than skeptical of the forthcoming demonstration; he twitted Sol upon his conversion to spiritualism, and his remarks were edged with open malice.

"Because Madame Turin gets me to stage a ghost dance in my house, is it a sign I believe in such things?" the host protested. "Anyhow, it's a free show and you got a good dinner thrown in, so what you kicking about? For all I know this Tremblay is a faker. There's fakers even in the fillum business, and for a while they get away with it." Ginsberg spoke with a smile, but he narrowed his eyes at Hyman.

Madame Turin resented the mental attitude of both men and said so. "The idea of criticizing a man of his eminence! Of course, I'm only a child in my understanding of the subject, nevertheless I could tell you of things I've seen, demonstrations that would surprise you. Whether or not you believe in a higher plane of existence, you will admit that we poor humans are drawn in opposite directions by conflicting forces, some beneficent, others malignant; forces of good and evil. If, through spiritual understanding, we attune ourselves to those benefi-

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cent powers they will inevitably sweep us onward to success. That, at least, is my theory."

"Maybe you're right," Hyman told her. "Anyhow, it's like that in the picture business:—some of us succeed in everything we touch. Why? Because we have the power to do big things. Others fail." Ginsberg felt something coming and essayed an interruption, but the speaker went on, "When actors ask me for advice, I tell them to get aboard a going concern, and line up with the successful, growing firms that can do the most for them. If your cart is hitched to a sick horse, cut the traces. Don't rats leave a sinking ship?" Hyman addressed this question directly to Stella Green, last of the Gins-Art stars. Miss Green was known to screen lovers as "California's Passion Flower, the Girl with the Million-dollar Back," and Ginsberg considered her the best vamp in the business. He read the double meaning in Hyman's words and a cold sweat broke out upon him. If the Passion Flower jumped, he was ruined.

"You said something, Ad," he declared. "It's only rats do like that."

Miss Donaldson spoke up in her lisping, childish voice: "Buth had a demonthrathion. Didn't you, Buth?"

Bush Thorndyke, pressed for details, confessed, "It happened while Miriam and I were making 'The

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Bride of Hate.' You remember the scene where the castle burns and I swing myself across the moat on the telegraph wire?"

"Where he ethcapeth from the Cage of Death and thaveth me from Duke Borith."

Ginsberg nodded vigorously. "I should forget it in a hurry, when the set cost thirty thousand dollars."

"Well, I had a slate-writing and it warned me to beware of fire and water," said Thorndyke, "so I pretended to have a sprained wrist and they doubled me. The wire broke and that double went to the hospital for six weeks."

"I remember that, too," Ginsberg asserted. "Like it was yesterday. He had a day and night nurse."

Hyman beamed. "On our lot, we have never hurt a principal. We're careful of our artists. Anyhow, those cheap stunt pictures are cold."

During and after dinner more guests arrived, and by nine o'clock, the hour set for Tremblay's appearance, the party included a good many of the local film notables.

The professor was late, but when he came he carried with him a large case which he carefully laid upon the hall table. Alone with Ginsberg in the latter's bedroom, he inquired, "Is Lord here?"

"Sure. Him and Moe had their dinner in the basement and everything is set. But the nerve of

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some people! Ad Hyman is after the 'Passion Flower.' In my own house! And it wouldn't surprise me if already she's jumped! He offers her seventeen-fifty a week and guarantees court costs if I sue. The *wiper!*" The producer mopped his moist brow. "Such a night! And on top of a wire from New York to hold up Turin's salary check till they can cover it! Just as well I should ask her to hold her breath that long."

"Ladies and gentlemen," Professor Tremblay addressed the assembled guests after his introduction, "I am not here in the guise of a necromancer, but as a cold, scientific investigator of spirit phenomena. The theory that intelligence is everlasting, that mind travels beyond the grave, that life continues after death, is neither new nor original. It is one of man's oldest beliefs, and to this investigation I ask that you bring neither a blind, unreasoning acquiescence nor a stubborn disbelief. Let me urge you to maintain open minds. That is the only true, scientific attitude.

"It has been my practice to appear only before academic audiences, therefore I declined Mr. Ginsberg's first invitation to come here. But upon second thought I realized the dignity and importance of your profession. I realized that here I should meet only the keenest minds; people with level heads and brilliant intuition. So it occurred to me

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that among you there might be an intellect capable of solving the occult mystery that has baffled the most learned of our purely scientific investigators."

There was heartfelt applause at this tribute to the higher intelligence of screen celebrities.

Madame Turin murmured audibly; "He's wonderful. And so young!"

Through his fine black beard the professor's teeth gleamed pleasantly. "Now for a brief history of the unique relic I have brought with me. Several years ago I was engaged in important research work which took me to the province of Poopar, four hundred and eighty miles northwest of Calcutta. There I was the guest of the rajah, a very old man at the time. Of course, I had heard of the famous Talking Vase of Poopar. Who has not? But I put it down as a native superstition, a myth. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when mine host assured me that it did indeed exist, although none but the eyes of yogis and priests had ever beheld it, none but holy men had held converse with it. It is perhaps a tribute to my standing in the world of occultism that I was finally permitted to see the vase, the most remarkable phenomenon the Orient has yet produced, and to test its powers. My report to the International Society created a sensation. I was regarded as a madman, for I reported that it actually spoke. The rajah's family is one of the oldest

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in the East; this urn from time immemorial had contained the sacred ashes of his forbears and he declared that the *voice was that of his ancestors!*"

There was a stir and a rustle from the audience. Miriam Donaldson's hand sought that of her manly co-star, Bush Thorndyke, and she chattered:

"It giveth me the creepth! I'm all over gooth fleth."

Ad Hyman leaned forward to whisper: "It's the bunk. But I've got to hand it to him. He's great."

Tremblay continued: "Inasmuch as my knowledge of the Indian language was incomplete and the rajah had to interpret for me, naturally the demonstration was not entirely satisfactory. Nevertheless, I proved beyond question that there was no trick, no fake about the voice, and I offered the rajah any sum for the relic. He refused to consider it.

"One day while tiger hunting I saved the life of his son, and later when the rajah died I induced the young man to surrender the vase into my keeping, with the understanding that I never leave it out of my possession and that I return it to the temple at Poopar in two years. He also exacted the strict proviso that I use it only for scientific demonstrations before serious-minded people, explaining how easy it would be for an unscrupulous person to enrich himself by consulting it on business affairs. You

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see, the voice is truly the voice of an oracle; it forecasts the future as unerringly as it reveals the past. That promise, ladies and gentlemen, I have scrupulously adhered to."

Madame Turin wished to know if the voice spoke only its native tongue.

"Ah! Now comes one of the strangest features of this bewildering business; one that has baffled the keenest minds of Europe and America. Shortly after the vase came into my possession, I noticed that it occasionally spoke an English word. Gradually, it came to speak English entirely, although with an accent not unlike that of my old friend the rajah. Within the last six months every trace of accent has disappeared.

"I will bore you no further with explanations. The vase is here and you are free to test its powers."

With these words the professor opened the case he had brought with him, exposing to view an antique urn, or pitcher, with a slender, graceful neck and a long, curving, covered spout not unlike that of a watering pot. The vessel appeared to be made of some composition lighter than clay, its body was covered with crude figures in bas relief. The audience pressed close and examined it inside and out.

"For our purpose we shall need a smaller room, one capable of accommodating perhaps a dozen chairs," the professor announced.

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"Use the library," Ginsberg offered, and thither Tremblay bore his precious burden.

"Excellent!" he said, upon his return. "Now then, I assume that most of you are convinced that there is such a thing as mind reading; thought transference, so I will not——"

"Wait a minute," Hyman broke in. "Nobody ever read *my* mind, and I don't believe it can be done, on the level."

Ginsberg laughed loudly at this. "First you got to *have* a mind, Ad, before anybody can read it. You don't ask the professor should accomplish the impossible, I hope?"

"So?" Hyman wheeled swiftly upon the speaker. "Maybe he can tell what I'm thinking right now. The ladies can leave the room for a minute, so he can speak it right out loud. And if you go with them it won't hurt anybody's feelings. I'm from Missouri. If I'm going to join the order, give me all the work. What do you mean, 'thought transference'?"

Madame Turin was distressed at this interruption. "There is always a disturbing element at every seance," she complained. "Skeptics and mental defectives should stay at home."

"Pardon! This is in no sense a seance." Tremblay raised his hands in good-natured protest. "I flatter myself that I have progressed far beyond

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that stage. Mr. Hyman is right. It was my mistake in assuming that you had gone further in your studies. However, I think I can readily prove to him that—well, that thoughts are things. Thought transference is one of our first steps. Mr. Hyman, will you oblige me by speaking a number? Any number of two figures.”

“I’ve got you. Twenty-three.”

“Twenty-three,” the professor nodded and stroked his forked beard. “Yonder is a telephone. Please call the Hotel Ambassador and ask for my secretary, Mr. Henry Graves.”

Hyman did as directed. There was a brief delay, then, “Hello! Professor Tremblay’s room, please. . . . Mr. Henry Graves?” Hyman covered the receiver with his palm and announced, “He’s on the wire.”

“Tell him, please, that I am thinking of a number and ask him what it is.”

Several people crowded close to Hyman while he repeated the message, holding the instrument away from his ear so that they, too, could hear the secretary’s answer. There was a moment’s delay, then the bystanders gasped. Hyman hung up, and turned with a foolish grin. “You win. He called the turn.”

Sol Ginsberg spoke above the chorus of exclamations, saying: “Of course, Ad, if it had been only you thinking of that number instead of all of us, it

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would of fell off the wire. It takes a mental athlete to shoot a message that far."

Tremblay now had the respectful attention of even the most incredulous. Over his evening clothes he slipped an elaborate Oriental robe, upon his head he placed a large turban which came well down over his ears; then he called for envelopes and paper.

"Please write your questions, sign, and seal them in the envelopes. Be careful that nobody sees what you write. I assume that all of you have lost dear ones; that you wish to learn whether they fare well or ill and whether life after death indeed exists. That is the most vital problem that vexes the human mind and I urge you to avail yourselves in all seriousness of this opportunity which may never be repeated. A supreme wisdom is at your call. Make the most of it."

Amid a great chewing of pencils and a heavy frowning of brows these instructions were followed. Meanwhile, the professor called for an assistant and for some receptacle in which to collect the sealed questions. Ginsberg hustled out of the room and shouted loudly for Moe Apple.

Apple appeared with a black cloth bag, and when the last query had been signed and sealed he passed through the audience and each guest with his own hands dropped his envelope into the bag. Tremblay next requested Apple to upset the bag and dump its

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contents upon a large brass tray which he had placed upon a table. This done, he waved the electrician out of the room, struck a match, and ignited the pile. As it blazed up he murmured something about "consuming fires," "purifying flames," and while he droned his incantation he stirred the blazing papers with a metal wand until the last one had been consumed, until the last charred and blackened remnant had been resolved to ashes. His voice became louder, more resonant as he announced:

"My friends, your hopes, your fears have passed on. Your words have been transmuted into a form visible to him who speaks through the rajah's vase. May his counsel aid and cheer you in your quest for the ultimate truth. Not all of you will hear the Voice; fortunate will be those to whom it gives a message. Now, as many of you as can find seats please follow me into the Presence."

No one could fail to be impressed by such gravity of mien, by such tones as issued from that majestic robed and turbaned figure. With some nervous giggling, the library filled up and the door was closed.

"Sit erect, with your hands upon your knees. Concentrate wholly upon the questions you have asked." The professor stood near the vase; his eyes were gleaming, his brow was furrowed, he had become dominant, immense. Again his voice became sepulchral: "Concentrate! Be silent! Wait!"

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Followed a long pause, insufferably intense. "Oh, Voice of the Vase! Great Spirit of Poopar!" Tremblay cried sonorously. "We knock at the gates of the Beyond. We await the sign."

Again a breathless silence, then came a faint rustling as of dry leaves, or the sighing of a breeze, and the bearded figure stirred. "He comes! The Voice! Yes, Mighty One, you call for—for Mary? Miriam? Is there a Miriam——?"

Miss Donaldson spoke in a reedy, frightened voice.

"Ith it me?"

"Come forward, please."

Miss Donaldson rose and went blindly to the table; she inclined her head and listened. Through the silence was heard the unmistakable tones of a thin, far-away voice. Far away, indeed, since it spanned centuries. Miss Donaldson gasped and clutched at her throat; she nodded as if in answer to a question, then she tried to form words, but her lips failed her. The murmur from the vase was like the faint tones of an oboe, but evidently the message was distinctly audible, for the girl's pallor increased with every sentence. Her bosom heaved; with her free hand she pawed aimlessly. Those who watched her growing agitation were appalled when, without warning, she uttered a piercing shriek and collapsed.

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The door to the living room was flung open. Ginsberg, Hyman, and others crowded through. They were met by Professor Tremblay bearing the unconscious star in his arms.

"It is nothing," he calmly announced. "The first subject has fainted, as usual."

Prompt restorative measures soon brought the victim around. She opened her eyes to discover Bush Thorndyke, white and helpless, staring down at her the while her employer, Ad Hyman, feverishly massaged her hands. A most amazing thing then occurred. Miss Donaldson snatched her hands away and spoke to Hyman as follows:

"You dirty dog!"

Hyman sat back upon his heels, his mouth fell open, then, attributing the outburst to hysteria, he spoke soothingly. But the diminutive beauty would not be soothed. "I've got your number, you—you *therpent!*" With one small palm she smote the producer a resounding smack upon his full, olive cheek. "Buth! *Buth!*" she wailed and held out her arms to Thorndyke.

Thorndyke knelt gracefully beside the couch and gathered her to his bosom. He moved slowly, as if through force of habit he timed his action to the cranking of a camera. Over his shoulder he explained:

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"We didn't intend to announce it, but Miriam and I were married a month ago."

"Ach!" Hyman recoiled; his eyes blazed. "There goes fifty thousand off 'The Gutter Lily'! And after I've spent a fortune advertising her as the Public's Darling. Co-starring with her *husband*! Why, it's like, announcing that Jackie Coogan is a married man! Isn't business rotten enough without trying to run the fans out of the theaters?"

Miss Donaldson had won fame by her ingénue portrayals, by her playing of placid, sixteen-year-old innocents, but she qualified now as an intensely emotional actress. She withered Hyman with a glare of hatred. "You thnake in the grath! Wait until I tell Buth! *Wait!*"

"I must warn all of you," gravely announced the professor, "that the Voice is pitiless. How could it be otherwise when it speaks only the Truth? Perhaps some of you fear disappointment, bad news——"

"It wathn't bad newth; it wath good newth," declared the bride of a month, the "Gutter Lily." "It—thaved my happineth." She bowed her head upon Thorndyke's chest, in the exact spot where she had bowed it so many times for the slow fade, and wet his shirt front with her tears.

"She seems to be all right again, so let's go on. There's something I simply *must* know." It was

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Stella Green of the expensive spine who spoke, and when others shared her eagerness the sitting was resumed.

This time it was Madame Turin who was summoned from the circle.

"You may take the vase in your arms," Tremblay told her. "Let us be sure there are no concealed wires—no trickery of any sort."

Reverently the singer lifted the relic and bore it to her chair. There was nothing hysterical about Turin; hers was the blazing ardor of a zealot. "I am waiting!" she declared in her full, round voice.

Again came the eerie whispering from the shadow world, but this time those sitting near the great artist could distinguish occasional words and phrases, and their scalps tingled.

". . . glorious gift of song prostituted . . . this vile and degrading employment . . . multitudes awaiting to acclaim . . . Paris, the entire Continent in grief at your desertion . . ."

"Yes, yes, but my contract?" Turin cried in tones of panic. "It calls for four more. I— It's— Oh, that is *impossible!*"

The birring continued for some time. Closer the song bird clutched the urn; she strained it to her bosom; her eyes were tragic. She questioned it, she argued, she protested. Hers was indeed a demonstration and she made the most of it.

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"Thais!" she cried at last. "But it was promised to another. . . . I—understand. It is the climate. I've noticed the change. . . . It will go and never return? . . . There's more money in opera. . . . I—I thank you."

It was plain that the singer had experienced a great shock, nevertheless she withstood it nobly. Like one in a trance she returned the vase to its guardian. Breathlessly she told him: "This was a priceless privilege. Priceless! And a superb demonstration! It has changed my entire career, my life."

Next the vase called for Wilbur Kent, most popular of the Notable Film Company's directors; then "Red" Courtney of the Screen Writers' Guild, and Stella Green, the last of the Gins-Art stars. Several others were likewise summoned.

Despite this unique opportunity of learning something about the spiritual world; about the beatitude of their departed relatives, it seemed that each and every one of these earnest students of the psychic had propounded questions concerning his or her own material selves:—questions of a purely business nature. Their yearning to prove the existence of life after death, strangely enough, had taken the form of requests for professional counsel. The future indeed concerned them, but their own immediate futures, only. That the Voice conversed in terms

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of dollars and cents, that it discussed salaries, contracts, renewals, and options, indicated that the rajah's spirit was not only endowed with a godlike patience, but also that it possessed an amazing familiarity with the film business. Much "inside" information passed between it and them and no more convincing evidence of a supreme intelligence could have been adduced.

The first group of sitters became enthusiastic converts and the library rapidly filled up for the second show.

Ad Hyman was among the first to receive a message, and evidently it was not a pleasant one. He said little, but he perspired freely, and even after he had gone back to his seat he continued to mop his face. He was no longer a skeptic, but a worried if reluctant apostate.

As for Ginsberg, when his turn came, he talked frankly to the vase—upon banking matters. "So? . . . It ain't possible? . . . Listen, I don't care if it *is* the biggest group in Wall Street. Why should I let 'em put in four hundred thousand dollars when already we got more money than we need? . . . Six per cent, eh? . . . Sure! And I don't know if I want to take on any more stars, either, with salaries coming down every day. . . . Wait! Don't tell me!"

Whatever it was the vase told him, Ginsberg was

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astonished. He could barely credit the good news, and when he had finally finished his spirit interview he announced to his hearers:

"Maybe it's a fake, but for what I just heard I wouldn't take a hundred thousand dollars cash." When he reseated himself he was seen to nod and to smile and to compute upon his fingers. He was heard to mutter strange and cryptic words.

The last guest had gone. In Ginsberg's dining room was laid out a midnight spread, largely liquid. At the table sat the producer himself, Jimmy Lord, Moe Apple, and Joe Thomas; before them was a stack of envelopes and sheets of note paper. These Sol and Moe were reading between drinks.

"Listen to this from Ad Hyman," chuckled the host. "'Is it safe to risk Myrtle Sawyer in a leading rôle?' Ha! It should take an Injun rajah to answer that! Only for Myrtle's sake and yours, Joe, I could wish Jimmy had boosted her for a Bernhardt."

Lord shook his head with a grin. "I warned him to beware of a blue-eyed woman who had recently come into his life, and said the home office had got wise. Told him they were sending out an efficiency man to cut overhead, and it meant her job or his. But Donaldson will put an end to Miss Sawyer's future, anyhow."

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"Say! What did you pull on her?" Ginsberg inquired. "I never heard such a screech."

"She's been getting candy through the mails for a month—some nutty 'fan' of course—but I told her it came from Ad and he intended to poison her so as to put Myrtle in opposite Thorndyke. Well, candy *is* poison to Miriam. Another five pounds and she'll be too fat to get over. While we were shooting 'The Bride of Hate,' she ate a box of Turkish paste and her liver went bad. It cost us six thousand dollars. Of course, I didn't know she and Bush were married—that was pure luck. I'll bet they'll be back on our lot in a week."

"It looks like a big night's work for you," Joe Thomas told his host, "with Madam Turin eager to cancel and hurry to Paris while there is yet time to save her voice and the future of grand opera, and with the Passion Flower wedded to Gins-Art for life, not to mention the others! Some of them spoke so low I was afraid the dictaphone wouldn't pick up their voices."

"I didn't catch everything they said," Lord confessed, "but after Donaldson did her flop they were ready to take anything."

"What made you call 'Red' Courtney?" Ginsberg inquired of the director.

"He's married to a rotten sequence in his last

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script and I thought I'd clean it up, for my own sake."

"Maybe you told him five hundred dollars was too much for a bum original?" Sol beamed hopefully.

"Say, you're in luck that nobody wandered downstairs and found Apple and me with that wireless rig and these written questions!"

Apple agreed to this. "Sure! A lot of 'em came here to kid the thing, and they'd have done it, too, only for Joe's thought transference. That one had me going and I don't know yet how he did it."

"Don't you fellows believe in anything except alcoholic spirits?" Joe grinned and put a new "collar" on his glass.

Ginsberg shook his head positively. "After tonight, spirits, with me, runs in the end book."

"Well, there is a bright bell boy at the Ambassador and I hired him to stay in my room. With him I left a list of names—two columns. The first column contained ten given names, like John, Henry, George, and so on, and each name was numbered; the second column was made up of ten family names, Adams, Murphy, Graves, Johnson, similarly numbered. When Hyman asked for Henry Graves, the boy looked at his list. Henry was two, Graves was three. He read my mind and knew I was thinking of twenty-three. It was as simple as Moe's conjurer's bag with the double pocket and the duplicate

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envelopes. That is an old gag, but I couldn't think of any better way to get those questions into Jimmy's hands."

"Tse! Tse!" Ginsberg clucked and shook his head. "It's a shame you should waste such brains on the electric business."

Moe Apple was examining the turban Joe had worn. He looked up to say: "Wasted, is it? And him with the patents granted for his new coil and this head set. It's too bad you won't have a piece of his royalties to waste on pictures. The first time I looked at that vase, I'll say it fooled me. I had to run a wire up the spout to detect the amplifier."

Thomas was of a similar mind. "Yes, if I've cured Myrtle of the movie habit, I won't consider my brains wasted. 'Fragrant Myrtle Thomas, the Wonder Wife'! I'll be around in the morning, Sol, and rip the wiring out of your library."

It was a week later. Joe Thomas looked up from a magazine as his wife spoke his name. Outside the car windows, the desert was gliding past.

"Yes, dearie?"

"Are you getting tired of me already?"

"Why, sweetheart, I'm in heaven!" The groom leaned forward and kissed her pouting lips.

"I didn't know. You haven't said anything nice

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for—ever so long. And, Joe! You'll never tell anybody what a miserable failure I was in pictures?"

"Nonsense! Who says you were a failure?"

A moment passed, then Mr. Thomas was again interrupted. "What are you reading, pettie?"

"One of those articles about spirits. It's great."

"Surely you don't believe in such things?"

"Of course I do! There are certain phenomena of nature——"

"You're one of them, dear." Mrs. Thomas favored her husband with an adoring gaze. "You're better looking than any of those leading men and I'm going to be frightfully jealous." The speaker ran her fingers through her husband's head of wavy, midnight hair and he grinned fatuously at her compliment. "Poor, hard-working Joe!" Again the pouting lips invited him. "This trip must have cost a fortune! And we could have spent the money for furniture!"

"Nothing like it, honey! You see, I wired Ginsberg's house for him while I was in Los Angeles and he gave me a tip to buy Gins-Art stock. The trip hasn't cost a cent."

TOO FAT TO FIGHT

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CHAPTER I

"Plattsburg. One Way"

PLATTSBURG. One way," Norman Dalrymple told the ticket agent. He named his destination more loudly, more proudly than necessary, and he was gratified when the man next in line eyed him with sudden interest.

Having pocketed his ticket, Dalrymple noted, by his smart new wrist watch with the luminous dial, that there was still twenty minutes before train time. Twenty minutes—and Shipp had a vicious habit of catching trains by their coat tails—a habit doubly nerve-racking to one of Dalrymple's ponderous weight and deliberate disposition. That afforded ample leeway for a farewell rickey at the Belmont or the Manhattan; it was altogether too long a time to stand around. Mr. Dalrymple—his friends called him "Dimples"—had long since concluded that standing was an unnatural posture for human beings, and with every pound he took on there

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came a keener appreciation of chairs, benches, couches, divans—anything and everything of that restful pattern except hammocks. Hammocks he distrusted and despised, for they had a way of breaking with the sound of gun-shots and causing him much discomfiture.

Next to standing, Dimples abhorred walking, for the truth is he shook when he walked. Therefore he chose the Belmont, that haven of rest being close at hand; but ere he had gained the street his eye was challenged by a sight that never failed to arrest his attention. It was the open door of an eating-place—the station restaurant—with idle waiters and spotless napery within. Now, drink was a friend, but food was an intimate companion of whom Dimples never tired. Why people drank in order to be convivial or to pass an idle quarter of an hour, the while there were sweets and pastries as easily accessible, had always been a mystery to him. Like a homing pigeon, he made for this place of refreshment.

Overflowing heavily into a chair, he wiped his full-moon face and ordered a corn-starch pudding, an insatiable fondness for which was his consuming vice.

As usual, Shipp made the train with a three-second factor of safety in his favor, and, recognizing the

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imposing bulk of his traveling companion, greeted him with a hearty:

"Hello, Dimples! I knew you'd come."

When they had settled themselves in their compartment Dalrymple panted, breathlessly:

"Gee! How I hate people who paw at departing trains."

"I made it, didn't I? You're getting fat and slow—that's what ails you. A fine figure of an athlete you are! Why, you're laying on blubber by the day! You're swelled up like a dead horse."

"I know," Dimples nodded mournfully. "I've tried to reduce, but I know too many nice people, and they all have good *chefs*."

"Boozing some, too, I suppose?"

"Oh, sure! And I love candy."

"They'll take you down at Plattsburg. Say! It's great, isn't it? War! The real thing!" Shipp's eyes were sparkling. "Of course it came hard to leave the wife and the baby, but—somebody has to go."

"Right! And we're the ones, because we can afford it. I never knew how good it is to be rich and idle—did you? But think of the poor devils who want to go and can't—dependents, and all that. It's tough on them."

The other agreed silently; then, with a smile, he said:

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"If they're looking for officer material at Plattsburg, as they say they are, why, you've got enough for about three. They'll probably cube your contents and start you off as a colonel."

Dimples's round, good-natured face had become serious; there was a suggestion of strength, determination, to the set of his jaw when he spoke.

"Thank God, we're in at last! I've been boiling ever since the Huns took Belgium. I don't care much for children, because most of them laugh at me, but—I can't stand to see them butchered."

Plattsburg was a revelation to the two men. They were amazed by the grim, businesslike character of the place; it looked thoroughly military and efficient, despite the flood of young fellows in civilian clothes arriving by every train; it aroused their pride to note how many of their friends and acquaintances were among the number. But, for that matter, the best blood of the nation had responded. Deeply impressed, genuinely thrilled, Shipp and Dalrymple made ready for their physical examinations.

Dimples was conscious of a jealous twinge at the sight of his former team-mate's massive bare shoulders and slim waist; Shipp looked as fit to-day as when he had made the All-American. As for himself, Dimples had never noticed how much he resembled a gigantic Georgia watermelon. It was indeed time he put an end to easy living. Well,

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army diet, army exercise would bring him back, for he well knew that there were muscles buried deep beneath his fat.

"Step lively!" It was an overworked medical examiner speaking, and Dimples moved forward; the line behind him closed up. As he stepped upon the scales the beam flew up; so did the head of the man who manipulated the counter-balance.

"Hey! One at a time!" the latter cried. Then with a grin he inquired, "Who's with you?" He pretended to look back of Dimples as if in search of a companion, after which he added another weight and finally announced, in some awe:

"Two eighty-five—unless I'm seeing double."

"*Two eighty-five!*" The chief examiner started; to Dalrymple he said: "Step aside, sir. Fall out."

"What's the idea?" Dimples inquired, with a rose-pink flush of embarrassment.

"You're overweight. Next!"

"Why, sure I'm overweight; but what's the difference?"

"All the difference in the world, sir. We can't pass you. Please don't argue. We have more work than we can attend to."

Shipp turned back to explain:

"This is Norman Dalrymple, one of the best tackles we ever had at Harvard. He's as sound as

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a dollar and stronger than a bridge. He'll come down——"

"I'm sorry; but there's nothing we can do. Regulations, you know."

"Sure!" The man at the scales was speaking. "Two eighty-five isn't a weight; it's a telephone number."

Dalrymple inquired, blankly:

"Do you mean to say I can't get in? Why, that's too absurd. I *must* get in! Can't you fix it somehow?"

"You're holding up the others. Won't you please step aside?"

Shipp drew the giant out of line and said, quietly:

"Don't argue. Get into your duds and wait for me. It will be all right. We know everybody; we'll square it."

But it was not all right. Nor could it be made all right. Weary hours of endeavor failed in any way to square matters, and the two friends were finally forced to acknowledge that here was an instance where wealth, influence, the magic of a famous name, went for naught. They were told politely but firmly that Norman Dalrymple, in his present state of unpreparedness, could not take the officers' intensive-training course. Dimples was mortified, humiliated; Shipp felt the disappointment quite as keenly.

"That's the toughest luck I ever heard of," the

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latter acknowledged. "You'll have to reduce, that's all."

But Dimples was in despair.

"It's healthy fat; it will take longer to run it off than to run the Germans out of France. The war will be over before I can do it. I want to get in *now*. Too fat to fight! Good Lord!" he groaned. "Why, I told everybody I was going in, and I cut all my ties. Now to be *rejected!*" After a time he continued: "It knocks a fellow out to reduce so much. If I managed to sweat it off in a hurry, I'd never be able to pass my physical. That sort of thing takes *months*."

Shipp silently agreed that there was some truth in this statement.

"Tough? It's a disgrace. I—I have *some* pride. I feel the way I did when I lost our big game. You remember I fumbled and let Yale through for the winning goal. I went back to the dressing-room, rolled up in a blanket, and cried like a baby. You and the other fellows were mighty decent; you told me to forget it. But I couldn't. I've never forgotten it, and I never shall."

"Pshaw! You made good later."

"I fell down when it was my ball. It's my ball now, Shipp, and I've fallen down again. I've led a pretty easy, useless life, these late years, but—I feel this thing in Europe more than I thought I could

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feel anything. I've contributed here and there, let my man go, and economized generally. I've adopted whole litters of French orphans, and equipped ambulance units, and done all the usual things the nice people are doing, but I was out of the game, and I wanted—Lord! how I wanted to be in it! When we declared war, I yelled! I went crazy. And then along came your wire to join you in this Plattsburg course. Good old Shipp! I knew you'd get on the job, and it raised a lump in my throat to realize that you were sure of me. I—was never so happy"—the speaker choked briefly—"as while waiting for the day to arrive. Now I've fumbled the pass. I'm on the sidelines."

CHAPTER II

Dimples Tries the Y. M. C. A.

NORMAN DALRYMPLE did not return home, nor did he notify his family of his rejection. Instead, he went back to New York, took a room at the quietest of his numerous clubs, engaged a trainer, and went on a diet. He minded neither of the latter very greatly for the first few days, but in time he learned to abhor both.

He shunned his friends; he avoided the club café as he would have avoided a dragon's cave. The sight of a push button became a temptation and a trial. Every morning he wrapped himself up like a sore thumb and ambled around the Park reservoir with his pores streaming; every afternoon he chased his elusive trainer around a gymnasium, striving to pin the man's hateful features, and never quite succeeding. Evenings he spent in a Turkish bath, attempting to attain the boiling point and failing by the fraction of a degree. He acquired a terrifying thirst—a monstrous, maniac thirst which gallons of water would not quench.

Ten days of this and he had lost three pounds. He

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had dwindled away to a mere two hundred and eighty-two, and was faintly cheered.

But he possessed a sweet tooth—a double row of them—and he dreamed of things fattening to eat. One dream in particular tried the strongest fiber of his being. It was of wallowing through a No Man's Land of blanc-mange with shell craters filled with cream. Frozen desserts—ice-cold custards! He trembled weakly when he thought of them, which was almost constantly. Occasionally, when the craving became utterly unbearable, he skulked guiltily into a restaurant and ordered his favorite dish, corn-starch pudding.

At the end of three weeks he was bleached; his face was drawn and miserable; he looked forth from eyes like those of a Saint Bernard. He had gained a pound!

Human nature could stand no more. Listlessly he wandered into the club café and there came under the notice of a friend. It was no more possible for Dimples to enter a room unobserved than for the *Leviathan* to slip unobtrusively into port. The friend stared in amazement, then exclaimed:

"Why, Norm! You look sick."

"'Sick?'" the big fellow echoed. "I'm not sick; I'm dying." And, since it was good to share his burden, he related what had happened to him. "Turned me down; wouldn't give me a chance," he

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concluded. "When I strained the scales, they wanted to know who I had in my lap. I've been banting lately, but I gain weight at it. It agrees with me. Meanwhile, Shipp and the others are in uniform." Dimples bowed his head in his huge, plump hands. "Think of it! Why, I'd give a leg to be in olive drab and wear metal letters on my collar! 'Sick?' Good Lord!"

"I know," the friend nodded. "I'm too old to go across, but I'm off for Washington Monday. A dollar a year. I've been drawing fifty thousand, by the way."

"I'm out of that, too," Dimples sighed. "Don't know enough—never did anything useful. But I could fight, if they'd let me." He raised his broad face and his eyes were glowing. "I'm fat, but I could fight. I could keep the fellows on their toes and make 'em hit the line. If—if they built ships bigger, I'd stowaway."

"See here——" The speaker had a sudden thought. "Why don't you try the Y?"

"'The Y?' Yale?"

"No, no. The Y. M. C. A."

"Oh, *that*! I've hired a whole gymnasium of my own where I can swear out loud."

"The Y. M. C. A. is sending men overseas."

"I'm not cut out for a chaplain."

"They're sending them over to cheer up the boys,

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to keep them amused and entertained, to run huts——”

Dalrymple straightened himself slowly.

“I know; but I thought they were all pulpit-pounders.”

“Nothing of the sort! They’re regular fellows, like us. They manage canteens and sell the things our boys can’t get. They don’t let them grow homesick; they make them play games and take care of themselves and realize that they’re not forgotten. Some of them get right up front and carry hot soup and smokes into the trenches.”

“Me for that!” Dimples was rising majestically. “I could carry soup—more soup than any man living. The trenches might be a little snug for me round the waist, but I’d be careful not to bulge them. Cheer up the boys! Make ’em laugh! Say—that would help, wouldn’t it?” He hesitated; then, a bit wistfully, he inquired, “The Y fellows wear—uniforms, too, don’t they?”

“Well, rather. You can hardly tell them from the army.”

In Dalrymple’s voice, when he spoke, there was an earnestness, a depth of feeling, that his hearer had never suspected:

“Uniforms mean a lot to me lately. Every time I see a doughboy I want to stand at attention and throw out my chest and draw in my stomach—as far

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as I can. There's something sacred about that olive drab. It's like your mother's wedding-dress, only holier, and decenter, if possible. Somehow, it seems to stand for everything clean and honorable and unselfish. The other day I saw the old Forty-first marching down to entrain, and I yelled and cried and kissed an old lady. Those swinging arms, those rifles aslant, those leggings flashing, and that sea of khaki rising, falling— Gee! There's something about it. These are great times for the fellows who aren't too old or too fat to fight."

"Those Y men fight, in their way, just as hard as the other boys, and they don't get half as much sleep or half as much attention. Nobody makes a fuss over them."

Dimples waited to hear no more. The Y.M.C.A.! He had not realized the sort of work it was doing. But to keep the boys fit to fight! That was almost as good as being one of them. And he could do it—better than anybody. As his taxicab sped across town he leaned back with a sigh of contentment; for the first time in days he smiled. The Y. M. C. A. would have no scales! To the boys at the front a fat man might be funnier even than a skinny one. He was mighty glad he had heard of the Y in time. And it would be glad he had, for his name was worth a lot to any organization. No more dry bread and spinach—*Gott strafe spinach!* How he hated it!

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No more exercise, either; he would break training instantly and tell that high-priced reducer what he really thought of him. Useful work, work to win the war, was one thing, but this loathsome process of trying out abdominal lard—ugh! He decided to dine like a self-respecting white man that very night, and to deny himself nothing. The club *chef* made a most wonderful cornstarch pudding, indescribably delicious and frightfully fattening. At the mere thought, an eager, predatory look came into Dimples's eyes. He would go overseas without delay; he would be in France doing his bit while Shipp and the others were still rehearsing their little tricks and learning to shout, "Forward, ouch!" Of course those fellows would win commissions—they were welcome to the glory—but meanwhile he would be right down in the dirt and the slime with the boys in leggings, cheering them up, calling them "Bill" and "Joe," sharing their big and their little troubles, and putting the pep into them. That's what they needed, that's what the world needed—pep! It would win the war.

Dalrymple was surprised when he entered the Y. M. C. A. quarters to find them busy and crowded. He sent in his card, then seated himself at the end of a line of waiting men. He wondered if, by any chance, they could be applicants like himself, and his complacency vanished when he learned that they

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could be—that, indeed, they were. His surprise deepened when he saw that in no wise did they resemble psalm shouters and Testament worms such as he had expected, but that, on the contrary, they looked like ordinary, capable business and professional men.

Dimples wondered if this were, after all, a competitive service. He broke into a gentle, apprehensive perspiration.

His name was called finally; he rose and followed a boy into a room where several men were seated at a table. Two of them were elderly, typical; they wore various unbecoming arrangements of white whiskers, and one glance told Dimples that they knew a lot about God. One of the others resembled a judge, and he it was who spoke first.

“You wish to go to France for the Y. M. C. A.?” the latter inquired.

“Yes, sir. They wouldn’t let me in at Plattsburg. I’m too fat, or the camp is too small. I’d very much like to go overseas.”

“It is hardly necessary to ask if you have had experience in promoting social entertainments and recreations.”

The speaker smiled. Dimples’s face broke into an answering grin.

“‘Entertainments!’ ‘Recreations!’ They are

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my stock in trade. I'm an authority on all kinds of both; that's what ails me."

Another member of the board inquired:

"Are you a temperate man, Mr. Dalrymple?"

"Oh no!" Dimples shook his head. "Not at all."

"What sort of—er—beverages do you drink?"

"What have you got!" the young giant blithely asked. Noting that his comedy met with no mirthful response, he explained more seriously: "Why, I drink practically everything. I have no particular favorites. I dare say it's against your rules, so I'll taper off if you say so. I'd take the Keeley to get across. Of course I make friends easier when I'm moderately lit—anybody does. I'm extraordinarily cheerful when I'm that way. You've no idea how——"

"Surely you understand that we tolerate no drinking whatever?"

"No, sir; I didn't fully understand. I know several Christian young men who drink—more or less. However, that's all right with me. I've never tried to quit drinking, so I'm sure I can."

"Are you familiar with the character and the aims of the Young Men's Christian Association?" One of the white-bearded gentlemen put this question.

"In a general way only. I knew you had a gym and a swimming tank and ran some sort of a Sunday school. It never appealed to me, personally, until I

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heard about this work you're doing in France. That's my size. That fits me like a pair of tights."

"Do you play cards?"

"Certainly. I'm lucky, too. Any game the boys want, from bridge to black jack."

"I mean—do you play for money?"

"Is that on the black list, too?" Dimples's enthusiasm was slowly oozing away. Noting the falling temperature of the room, he confessed honestly, but with some reluctance: "I suppose I do all of the things that ordinary idle fellows do. I drink and gamble and swear and smoke and overeat and sleep late. But that doesn't hurt me for carrying soup, does it?"

No one answered this challenge; instead, he was the recipient of another question that caused him to squirm.

"Would you consider yourself a moral young man?"

Slowly the applicant shook his head.

"To what Church do you belong?"

"I don't."

"How long since you attended divine service?"

"A good many years, I'm afraid."

There followed a moment of silence; the men at the table exchanged glances, and into Dimples's face there came an apprehensive, hunted look. He wet his lips, then said:

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"Anyhow, you can't accuse me of mendacity. I don't lie. Now that you know the worst about me, I'd like to inventory my good points." This he proceeded to do, but in all honesty it must be said that his showing was not impressive. Never having given serious thought to his virtues, there were few that he could recall at such short notice. He concluded by saying: "I know I can make good if you'll give me a chance. I—I'll work like a dog, and I'll keep the boys laughing. I won't let them get homesick. I— Why gentlemen, this is my last chance! It will break my heart if you turn me down."

Not unkindly the "judge" said:

"We will consider your application and notify you."

This very kindness of tone caused the fat man to pale.

"I know what that means," he protested. "That's Y. M. C. A. for 'no.' Let me go," he implored. "I'll serve. I'll stand the punishment. I'm strong and I'll work till I drop. You won't be ashamed of me, honestly."

"We'll notify you without delay, Mr. Dalrymple."

There was no more to be said. Dimples wallowed out of the room with his head down.

That night he walked the soft-carpeted floor of his chamber until very late, and when he did go to bed it was not to sleep. Daylight found him turning

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restlessly, his eyes wide open and tragic. Another failure! Within him the spirit of sacrifice burned with consuming fury, but there was no outlet for it. Through his veins ran the blood of a fighting family; nevertheless, a malicious prank of nature had doomed him to play the part of Falstaff or of Fatty Arbuckle. What could he do to help? Doubtless he could find work for his hands in ship-yard or foundry, but they were soft, white hands, and they knew no trade. Give? He had given freely and would give more; but everybody was giving. No; action called him. He belonged in the roar and the din of things where men's spirit tells.

That afternoon he was waddling down Fifth Avenue when Mr. Augustus Van Loan stopped him to exclaim:

"Good Heavens, Dimples! What has happened to you?"

Van Loan was a malefactor of great wealth. His name was a hissing upon the lips of soap-box orators. None of his malefactions, to be sure, had ever yet been uncovered, nor were any of the strident-voiced orators even distantly acquainted with him, but his wealth was an established fact of such enormity that in the public eye he was suspect.

"I'm all in," the disconsolate mammoth mumbled, and then made known his sorrow. "Too fat to get into the army; too soft morally to get into the

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Y. M. C. A. I didn't know how rotten I am. I can't carry a gun for my country; I'm not good enough to lug soup to the boys who do. And, meanwhile, the Huns are pressing forward."

Van Loan eyed him shrewdly.

"Do you feel it as badly as all that?"

Dalrymple nodded.

"I don't want to be a hero. Who ever heard of a hero with a waistband like mine? No; I'd just like to help our lads grin and bear it, and be a big, cheerful fat brother to them."

Without a word Mr. Van Loan took a card from his pocket and wrote a few lines thereon.

"Take that down to the Y and tell them to send you on the next ship." He handed Dimples the card, whereupon the giant stared at him.

"D—d'you know that outfit?"

"*Know* it?" Van Loan smiled. "I'm the fellow who's raising the money for them. They've darn near broken me, but—it's worth it."

With a gurgling shout Dimples wrung the malefactor's hand; then he bolted for the nearest taxi-stand and squeezed himself through a cab door.

Ten minutes later he entered the board-room at the Y. M. C. A. and flung Van Loan's card upon the table.

"Read that!" he told the astonished occupants.

The "judge" read and passed the card along.

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"Where do I go from here?" Dimples demanded, in a voice of triumph.

"Why"—the "judge" cleared his throat—"to your tailor's for a uniform, I should say."

CHAPTER III

"One Man to Every Ten!"

LATE the following afternoon, as the judicial member of the Y examiners was leaving the building, his path was barred by a huge, rotund figure in khaki which rose from a bench in the hall. It was Dalrymple.

"I've been blocking traffic here for an hour," the giant explained. "Look at me! It's the biggest uniform in New York, and it was made in the shortest time." Noting the effect his appearance created, he went on, "I suppose I do look funny, but—there's nothing funny to me about it."

The elder man's face grew serious.

"I'm beginning to believe you'll make good, Dalrymple. I hope so, for your sake and for the sake of the Association. If you don't, we'll have to order you back."

"I'll take that chance. You gentlemen think I'm unfit to wear these clothes and—maybe I was yesterday, or even this morning. But when I saw myself in this uniform I took stock and cleaned house. I got all my bad habits together and laid them away in moth balls for the duration of the war."

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"That means something for a man like you. What induced you to do it?"

"This." Dalrymple stroked his khaki sleeve with reverent, caressing fingers. "It's almost like the real thing, isn't it? Not quite, but near enough. It's as near as I can ever get, and I shan't do anything to disgrace it. I can shut my eyes and imagine it *is* the real thing. I don't suppose you understand in the least what I'm driving at——"

"I think I understand thoroughly, sir. But don't believe for a moment there is anything counterfeit, anything bullet-proof, about what you have on. You will be fighting, Dalrymple, just the same as the other boys; every service you perform, every word of cheer, every deed of kindness, will be a bomb dropped back of the German lines. Why, man, do you know that the work of the Y. M. C. A. adds ten per cent. to our fighting force? It's a fact; Pershing says so. If you make good, you'll be adding one man to every ten you meet."

"'One man to every ten!'" Dimples breathed. "That's great! That's more than I could have done the other way. I'm good for something, after all."

It seemed impossible that a wealthy, prominent young New York club-man could so quickly, so utterly drop out of sight as did Dimples Dalrymple. One day he was in his familiar haunts, a rotund,

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mirth-provoking spectacle in his bulging uniform, with his tiny overseas cap set above his round, red face like the calyx of a huge ripe berry; the next day he was gone, and for several months thereafter his world knew him not.

CHAPTER IV

Hill Two Eighty-five

CAPTAIN SHIPP, now attached to a famous division awaiting embarkation, was the first to hear from him. He read Dimples's letter twice before passing it on. It ran as follows:

DEAR BRIGADIER-GENERAL,—You must be all of the above by this time; if not, there is favoritism somewhere and you ought to complain about it. Probably you're wondering where I am. Well, that's your privilege, Brig. I'm in a two-by-four village with a name as long as the Frisco System, and you'll instantly recognize it when I tell you it has one white street and a million rats. There are no houses whatever. Further information might give aid and comfort to the enemy.

I've written lots of letters back home, but this is the first one of my own that I've had time for. I'm in the game, Brig, and I haven't fumbled the ball. I live in a little tin shanty with a sand-bag roof, and I wear a little tin hat that holds just enough warm water to shave with. It held more—until lately; now there's a hole in it that I wouldn't trade for the Hudson "tube." I was starting out with two cans of hot cocoa when the street was shelled. I spilled the boys' cocoa and got a dent in my own, but those Bessemer derbies are certainly handy shock-absorbers. I woke up with my head in Dr. Peters's lap.

Right here I must make you acquainted with Pete. He's

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a hundred-pound hymn-weevil, and the best all-round reverend that ever snatched a brand from the burning. He dragged me in under cover all alone, and he used no hooks. Pretty good for a guy his size, eh?

Pete and I are partners in crime—and, say, the stuff we pull in this hut! Movies, theatricals, concerts, boxing-bees—with the half-portion reverend in every scrimmage. He's a Syncopated Baptist, or an Episcopalian Elk, or something; anyhow, he's nine parts human and one part divine. That's the way the Y is wearing them over here. He's got the pep, and the boys swear by him. When the war is over he hopes to get a little church somewhere, and I'm going to see that he does, if I have to buy it, for I want to hear him preach. I never have heard him, but I'll bet he's a bear. Take it from me, he'll need a modest cathedral with about six acres of parking-space inside and a nail in the door for the S. R. O. sign.

We have a piano, and games, and writing-materials, and a stock of candy and tobacco and chocolate and stuff like that. I haven't tasted a single chocolate. Fact! But it has made an old man of me. Gee! I'd give that loft building on Sixteenth Street to be alone with an order of cornstarch pudding. However, barring the fact that I haven't lost an ounce in weight, I'm having a grand time, for there's always something to do. Details are constantly passing through, to and from the front-line trenches, which (whisper) are so close that we can smell the Germans. That's the reason we wear nose-bags full of chloride of lime or something. Pete and I spend our days making millions of gallons of tea and coffee and cocoa, and selling canned goods, and sewing on buttons, and cracking jokes, and playing the piano, and lugging stretchers, and making doughnuts, and getting the boys to write home to mother, and various little odd jobs; then, at night, we take supplies up to the lads in the front row of the orchestra. That's a pretty game, by the way, for a man of my size. Nobody

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ever undertakes to pass me in a trench; I lie down and let them climb over. It keeps the boys good-natured, and that's part of my job. "Hill Two Eighty-five"—that's what they call me.

We had a caller to-day. One of the Krupp family dropped in on us and jazzed up the whole premises. There is Bull Durham and rice papers and chocolate and raspberry jam all over this village, and one corner of our hut has gone away from here entirely. We haven't found the stove, either, although Pete retrieved the damper, and the rest of it is probably somewhere near by.

Of course I had nothing hot for the boys when I went up to-night. It was raining, too, and cold. But they didn't mind. They don't mind anything—they're wonderful that way. We all had a good laugh over it, and they pretended they were glad it was the stove and not I that got strafed. I really believe they like me. Anyhow, they made me think they do, and I was so pleased I couldn't resist sitting down and writing you. Altogether, it was a great day and a perfect evening.

Yours till the last "down,"

DIMPLES.

CHAPTER V

Dimples Takes Part in a Ceremony

DURING the first few weeks after his arrival in France Captain Shipp had no time whatever for affairs of his own, but a day came finally when he took a train for a certain base close up behind an American sector, intending there to more definitely locate Dimples's whereabouts and to walk in upon him unannounced. It would be a memorable reunion; he could hear now the big fellow's shout of welcome. That genial behemoth would have a tale to unfold, and they would talk steadily until Shipp's leave was up.

But bad news was waiting at the base—news that sent the captain hurrying from first one hospital to another.

"Dalrymple? Oh yes, he's here," an orderly informed the distracted visitor.

"Is he— May I see him?"

A small, hollow-eyed man with a red triangle upon his sleeve rose from a chair and approached to inquire:

"Are you, by any chance, Captain Shipp?"

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"I am."

"Dimples has often spoken of you. He has been expecting you for weeks. I'm just going in."

"You are Doctor Peters—Pete?" The Y secretary nodded. "What ails him? I heard he was wounded——"

"Yes. His leg. It's very serious. I come every day."

The speaker led the way, and Shipp followed down a long hall redolent of sickly drug smells, past clean white operating-rooms peopled with silent-moving figures, past doors through which the captain glimpsed dwindling rows of beds and occasional sights that caused his face to set. In that hushed half-whisper assumed by hospital visitors, he inquired:

"How did it happen?"

"There was a raid—a heavy barrage and considerable gas—and it caught him while he was up with supplies for the men. He began helping the wounded out, of course. It was a nasty affair—our men were new, you see, and it was pretty trying for green troops. They said, later, that he helped to steady them quite as much as did their officers."

"I can believe that. He's a man to tie to."

"Yes, yes. We all felt that, the very first day he came. Why, he was an inspiration to the men! He was mother, brother, pal, servant to the best and to

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the worst of them. Always laughing, singing—
There! Listen!”

The Reverend Doctor Peters paused inside the entrance to a ward, and Shipp heard a familiar voice raised in quavering song:

“By the star-shell’s light,
I see you; I see you.
If you want to see your father in the Fatherland,
Keep your head down, Fritzie boy.”

“Why”—Shipp uttered a choking cry—“he’s out of his head!”

“Oh, yes; he has been that way ever since they amputated.”

“‘Amp—’ Good God!” Shipp groped blindly for support; briefly he covered his eyes. Then, like a man in a trance, he followed down the aisle until he stood, white-lipped and trembling, at the foot of Dalrymple’s bed.

It was difficult to recognize Dimples in this pallid, shrunken person with the dark, roving eyes and babbling tongue. The voice alone was unchanged; it was husky, faint as if from long, long use, but it was brave and confident; it ran on ceaselessly:

“Keep your nerve up, pal; you’re standing it like a hero, and we’ll have you out to the road in no time. Smokes! I tell you they must have smokes if you have to bring ’em in on your back—Gangway for the soup-man! Come and get it, boys.

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Hot soup—like mother used to make. Put on the Harry Lauder record again. Now then, all together:

“I love a lassie, a bonnie, blue-eyed lassie.”

The little minister had laid a cool hand upon Dimples's burning brow; his head was bowed; his lips were moving.

“When did you write to your mother last?” the sick man babbled on. “Sure I'll post it for you, and I'll add a line of my own to comfort her— Water! Can't you understand? He wants water, and mine's gone. Too fat to fight! But I'll make good; I'll serve. Give me chance— Steady, boys! They're coming. They're at the wire. Now give 'em hell! We'll say it together, old man; ‘Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name——’ ”

There were scalding tears in Shipp's eyes; his throat was aching terribly when Doctor Peters finally led him out of the ward. The last sound he heard was Dalrymple's voice quavering:

“Over there! Over there!

And we won't come back till it's over, over there.”

“I had my hands full at the hut, for the wounded were coming in,” Doctor Peters was saying, “but every one says Dimples did a man's work up there in the mud and the darkness. Some of the fellows confessed that they couldn't have hung on, cut off as they were, only for him. But they did. It was

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late the next day before we picked him up. He was right out in the open; he'd been on his way back with a man over his shoulders. He was very strong, you know, and most of the stretcher-bearers had been shot down. The wounded man was dying, so Dimples walked into the barrage."

"And he was afraid he wouldn't make good!" Shipp muttered, with a crooked, mirthless smile.

"Yes—imagine it! There was never a day that he didn't make me ashamed of myself, never a day that he didn't do two men's work. No task was too hard, too disagreeable, too lowly. And always a smile, a word of cheer, of hope. Our Master washed people's feet and cooked a breakfast for hungry fishermen. Well, the spirit of Christ lives again in that boy."

Shipp's leave had several days to run; such time as he did not spend with Doctor Peters he put in at Dimples's bedside. He was there when the delirium broke; his face was the first that Dimples recognized; his hand was the first that Dimples's groping fingers weakly closed upon.

They had little to say to each other; they merely murmured a few words and smiled; and while Dimples feasted his eyes upon the brown face over him, Shipp held his limp, wasted hand tight and stroked it, and vowed profanely that the sick man was looking very fit.

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Later in the day the captain said, with something like gruffness in his voice:

"Lucky thing you pulled yourself together, old man, for you're booked to take part in a ceremony to-morrow. A famous French general is going to kiss you on both cheeks and pin a doodad of some sort on your nightie."

Dimples was amazed.

"Me? Why, the idea!"

"Sure!" Shipp nodded vigorously. "Ridiculous, isn't it? And think of me standing at attention while he does it. Pretty soft for you Y fellows. Here you are going home with a decoration before I've even smelled powder."

"Oh, I'm not going home," the other declared. "Not yet, anyhow. A one-legged man can sell cigarettes and sew on buttons and make doughnuts just as well as a centipede."

A smiling nurse paused at the bed to say:

"You're awfully thin, Mr. Dalrymple, but we'll soon have you nice and fat again. The doctor says you're to have the most nourishing food—anything you want, in fact."

"*'Anything?'*"

"Anything within reason."

Dimples grinned wistfully, yet happily.

"Gee!" said he. "I'd like some cornstarch pudding."

THE END

